

One Thing

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Date: 18 August 2013

Preacher: Andrew Longwe

[0 : 00] If you'd like to have your Bibles open, look chapter 10 and at verse 38. It says in verse 41, Martha, Martha, you're worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.

I wonder what an average day in your life looks like. Maybe you'll be able to empathize with this sort of experience. Wake up in the morning with the sound of the alarm clock buzzing in your ears.

Lean over, hit the snooze button to shut it up and take it back to sleep. Gaze off again, gaze off again, it's the same process. Then you find yourself yawning, stretching your arms, and in your mind you start to think, I better get up because I've got such a busy day ahead.

You roll off your doovy cover, you swing your feet over the side of your bed, and then your bedside table lies your Bible. You think to yourself, well, I better read that, but I'll get washed and dressed first.

So you get up, you drag yourself to the bathroom, you get washed, you get dressed. You make yourself some breakfast and you eat it, and then before you know it, you start thinking where has the time went.

[1 : 10] And if anything can, and if things couldn't get any worse, the phone rings. You rush to answer the phone, you spend 10, 15 minutes or so speaking to an old friend, catching up on things, but as soon as you hang up the phone, you realise that you're in this frantic panic to catch that bus.

You grab your jacket and your scarf, more thoughts fly through your head about the dentist appointment that needs to get booked, about the food that needs to be bought for the evening's dinner, and so you run out the door to a busy day ahead.

After your long day at work, you come home, you meet your dinner, you enjoy it, you wash up, and all you want to do is crash out before the TV. And as you're sitting on the couch, you maybe think to yourself, I should really spend some time in prayer and with the Bible.

But just then, your favourite television programme comes on and you watch it, and after the closing credits wind up the screen, your eyes are heavy with sleep, and so you drag yourself up to your bed.

You might see your Bible lying next to the bedside table again. Too tired to read it, and so you murmur a few words to God in prayer, and your eyes close, and an opportunity for deep and meaningful fellowship with the Lord has gone.

[2 : 27] I don't know if that is your experience some days, but I know for me that can so easily happen. This evening I want us to look at this well-known story of Mary and Martha, and it's a story all about getting our priorities straight.

The story in short is about two sisters, and how one of them is an example of what it means to love the Lord our God with all our being.

It only struck me that this is what this passage is about in preparation for the sermon. If you got your Bibles open there and then you look at verse 25, it says on occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.

The teacher he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? It's a strange question, isn't it? What must I do to inherit eternal life? I can't do anything to inherit eternal life.

You can only be in a relationship with someone to inherit something, and so Jesus says to him, you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.

[3 : 34] You must love your neighbour as yourself. In other words, you must be in a right relationship with me to inherit eternal life. But as the conversation continues, Jesus tells this expert in the law the story of the Good Samaritan, and he does so to illustrate what it means to love our neighbour.

And then as we continue to read in this chapter, Luke adds this story of Mary and Martha, which actually is an illustration of what it is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength.

One of the reasons I love this story so much is because this is a living example of the struggle that we can often face as Christians to love Him with all of our being.

Now, as I preach this this evening, I don't want to fall into the danger of saying, are you a Mary or are you a Martha? Because I'm sure all of us this evening would agree that most of us see ourselves in Martha.

Most of us know what it is to get caught up and so busy and so distracted that we fail to take the time to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to Him. But what I want us to do tonight is to observe and see what we can learn in this passage as Martha is restored by Jesus lovingly and tenderly.

[4 : 54] And as Mary and her silent testimony as she sits at His feet. And so I want to look at this passage this evening under three very simple headings. First of all, I want to look at Martha.

I want to look at some revealing statements that she makes in this passage. And secondly, we'll spend most of our time looking at some revealing words that are in this passage used both by Jesus and look to describe Martha and to describe how she was restored by Jesus.

And then finally, and very briefly to look at a revealing posture of Mary and what we can learn from that. So revealing statements, revealing words and a revealing posture.

Just imagine it. It's verse 38 begins. It says that Jesus and His disciples were on their way to Jerusalem. And as they're on their way and they pass through this town called Bethany. And a frequent thing for them to do is to stop by their friend's house, Mary and Martha and Lazarus house.

And so they stop to take a break and it says in verse 39 that Martha opened the door and welcomed them in. And as we know about Jesus, Jesus is here because He's here to announce the good news of the Kingdom of God.

[6 : 05] He's here to do the work of the Savior and to give His life as a ransom for many. And so as He comes into the house, it's most likely that He sat down and in His usual fashion started to teach.

And so Mary comes and she sits at His feet and she listens. Imagine you were a disciple on the house that day. You were sitting and as you were sitting, you'd heard the message that Jesus was sharing so you took the opportunity to get up and have a wander around the house.

You walk into the kitchen and there's Martha. You start a conversation with Martha. You say, Martha, how are you doing today? And just at that she turns round and she looks at you and you see there's a seriousness in her face.

And she says, well, if I'm honest, I'm really frustrated. It's a big problem, Martha. What's wrong? And as she looks over and looks through the kitchen door into the living room, see that sister of mine sitting there doing absolutely nothing when there's all this preparation to get done.

Let's just read verses 39 and 40 again. She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.

[7 : 19] She came to Jesus and asked, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me. And that's the first revealing statement I want us to look at tonight.

Tell her to help me. And I don't think that should surprise us because if we were in Martha's shoes, I'm sure we'd have said the very same thing. I'm sure many of us know what it's like when we've got someone, I guess, coming to visit our house. And the hardest thing ever to do is to get our fellow family members to help us tidy and prepare the house when someone's coming.

And so let's not be too hard on Martha. She wants to serve Jesus. She wants to know the privilege of preparing a meal for the one whom she loves.

And you may have thought that Mary, our sister, would actually have got up. She'd have been into the kitchen and she'd have helped her. But no, instead all she does is she sits at the feet and she listens to Him.

You can just imagine as you're that disciple standing in the kitchen, watching Martha as she slaves away, speaking to herself, it's just as well that there's someone here to get everything done.

[8 : 28] And maybe you can empathise with her feelings and what's going on in her heart. A bit of resentment, bitterness. Mad at her fellow sibling.

You often express that anger, don't you, by banging a door and stamping your feet and maybe Martha that day picked up the pots and the pans as she was preparing and slammed them down. Mad at her sister.

And I think that sister tension really adds to the life of this passage. I'm sure those of us with brothers and sisters know what it's like growing up with siblings and getting mad at them.

Mad at them for not doing what we want them to do. Making statements similar to Martha. Mum, Dad, tell them to help me.

It's interesting though whenever we make these sorts of statements, it's often a significant symptom and an indicator of something that's wrong.

[9 : 27] That may be our motives or our priorities. Namely, it's when we put ourselves above everyone else and think that what we're doing is so important and so we get mad at everyone else because we are so me-centered.

We don't really care what everyone else wants to do. We'll just continue, you're a disciple and you're having that conversation with Martha and you imagine saying to Martha, Martha, is that all that's wrong with you?

Is Mary all that's wrong with you? And she says, well, yes. In fact, no. Jesus, he's anointed me too. I wonder if you've seen that in our reading, verse 40.

Picture Martha, she bursts into the living room, interrupts the conversation. Jesus is in with her sister and says, Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?

Lord, don't you care? That's her second revealing statement of Martha. Martha is not just out of sorts with her sister Mary. She's also out of sorts with her savior.

[10 : 35] You see, that's softened because the one leads to the other. Have you ever fallen out with a fellow brother and sister in Christ and found that your relationship with Jesus Christ is out of kill?

Have you ever found that after an argument with a family member or someone in the church, you actually struggled to pray? In one sense, her statements revealed that she's out of kill with the Lord because she asks the foolish question, Lord, don't you care?

Of course the Lord cares. He cares so much that he's in the world to come and do what she couldn't do for herself. He's here to go to the cross and take the punishment for a health-deserving sinner like us and like Martha.

Jesus cares. He cares so much that he once said, come to me all you who are weary and burdened, I will give you rest. Her statement is so revealing because all she cares about is herself.

Christ even cares about that. In this passage, in a few moments, we're going to see Christ as he gently, lovingly, and tenderly shows her how she's got it all wrong.

[11 : 51] Interestingly enough, Martha's big problem, Martha's big concern, is preparing a meal. What she hadn't grasped was that she is the one who's created all this worry and all this fun for us.

And I think there's something in this, isn't there, that we too can often fall into the trap of. The worries of the everyday life can take over and weigh us down so much so that we think more about ourselves than we do about God.

One of the striking things in this passage in light of that is that Jesus never asked Martha to prepare him a fancy meal. But Jesus did say elsewhere in the Gospels, man doesn't live by bread alone, but by every word that precedes from the mouth of God.

And here Martha has an opportunity to feast on the Word of God, but instead she's so distracted, she's taken up and she's taken away, and she misses her opportunity to just sit at his feet and feast on him.

So those are the two revealing statements, tell her to help me and Lord, don't you care. Let's now look at some revealing words in this passage. Let's look at revealing words used to describe Martha.

[13 : 12] The first revealing word we get is in verse 40, Martha was distracted. Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.

This word distracted is a fascinating word. In the original, it literally means to be drawn away. It's a very descriptive word that has the idea that Martha started off listening to what Jesus was saying, but half her mind was also on what was cooking.

I'm sure we know what that experience is like perhaps on a Sunday afternoon, we go to our friend's house for dinner and the person who's making the dinner, they want to hear what's going on at the dining table or what's going on in the living room, but they also need to concentrate and have their mind on what's cooking.

Well that's like Martha, half her mind is what Jesus is saying, half her mind is on what's cooking, but it draws her away, she's distracted. She really wanted to listen to Jesus, but all the preparations took over.

And what Martha saw is more important, what became more of a priority was serving Jesus rather than being with Jesus.

[14 : 23] When there's things that are drawn us away from Jesus, we too busy and concerned with this idea that we need to serve Him than actually to be with Him and spend precious time with Him.

Jesus called His disciples, He didn't call them first and foremost to go into the world and preach the Gospel and make disciples. He called them first and foremost to be with Him, to walk with Him, to follow Him.

In John 15, Jesus when He was teaching His disciples one of the most important lessons ever, He said to them, remain in me, abide in me. Remain in me and my words will abide in you.

Remain in my love, my love will abide in you. Remain in my joy, my joy will be completing you. It says in John 15 verse 8, this is how we glorify God.

This is how we prove ourselves to be disciples, that we remain in Him. I wonder how many of us are distracted and taken away and have lost the beauty and the joy of just remaining in our Saviour.

[15 : 32] The second revealing word that we read in this passage is a word from Jesus. It's verse 41 and it's the beginning of His tender rebuke and tender restoration of her. He says, Martha, Martha, Martha.

Now it's twofold repetition of Martha's name isn't just for emphasis. It's an expression of tender affection. Martha's not loving Him the way she should.

And so in other words Jesus rebukes her and says, Martha, Martha. Tonight the Spirit of God will do the same thing in our hearts. Andrew, Andrew, are you listening?

The third revealing word we read, Jesus says, Martha, Martha, you are worried. Now if you're to read all the Bible translations, you'll find that they translate this word differently.

First she was distracted, now she's worried, anxious, but really has idea that she was just pulled in different directions. She's so worried about it. And it's like when we say in the morning, I really should read my Bible, I really should spend some time in prayer, but then we're taken away, pulled in different directions by the phone that rings, by the work that lies ahead, by the appointments that need to be booked.

[16 : 49] We just are worried and confused. And Jesus says you're worried, Martha, and you're upset. And this word upset, the root word is actually the whole idea is there's a storm going on in our hearts.

She is an uproar. Uproar over a meal that she used to prepare for Jesus. Under how often do we get so mad, so irritated over small things in life?

And these things take us away from having that real deep intimate fellowship with Jesus. I wouldn't be surprised if there are some of us here in church tonight who are spiritually distracted, spiritually worried and spiritually upset.

Jesus goes on to say you're worried, you're upset. And the next revealing word is about many things. And here we get to the root of the story. Here Jesus uncovers Mary's, Martha's wrong priorities.

As if Jesus says to her, Martha, see all these things that are burdening you, all these things that are distracting you, all these things that are causing you to worry and be upset. These things, these many things, they aren't necessary things.

[18 : 10] You see your whole emphasis, Martha, is how you can serve me. Jesus is about a teacher that only one thing is needed.

And her necessity is not that she should serve him, but that she should be with him. Let's just let that sink in. Not that she should serve him, but that she should be with him.

Jesus said, for the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus came into this world not so that people could just prepare meals for him in all of these things, but most importantly so that he could save them from the punishment and the wrath of God and the things that their sin deserved, so that they could have this intimate fellowship with God, so that sinners can be reconciled to a holy God.

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to give his life as a ransom for many. And the primary thing that Martha needs to think about is not what she's going to do for him, but what he's going to do for her.

Notice the parallel. Many things, and then the one thing. The next revealing word that Jesus speaks of in verse 42. Only one thing is needed.

[19 : 36] Here we see the difference in mindset. The most important thing that a disciple can do is to do the one thing that is needed, and that is to sit and to listen to Jesus.

And it's like Jesus says to her, Martha, you haven't been able to do that. Your mind has been elsewhere. You're so distracted. You haven't had time for me because you're so busy, and it's just not important enough for you.

It's not your priority. Only one thing is needed. That one thing is to be still and to know that I am God and to listen to me.

That is what it is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and all your being. It's to have this relationship with him where he is Lord and we listen to him and love him.

I sign that we are not loving God the way we should. Is it all our priorities are haywire, but all confused? And it becomes all about what we're doing for him and not about what he's done for us.

[20 : 43] And so we lack that direction and we lack that guidance and assurance that we need because we don't spend precious time in his presence.

Many of our Christian lives are totally undernourished, exhausted, because we're just not spending time in the presence of our Savior.

I wonder when was the last time metaphorically that you sat at the feet of Jesus? When was the last time you were still in his presence and came to know that he is God?

The thing that was really scratching at my soul today is why do I spend so much time wasting my life when I could sit and be still in the presence of Jesus?

We were made to be in a relationship with our Savior and time with him is infinitely more precious and infinitely more valuable than anything this world could offer.

[21 : 47] We could find ourselves wasting minutes and hours doing things that are just pointless and aimless. Minutes and hours on Facebook when our face should be in the book.

And it's an hours chatting with friends and cultivating relationships with other people yet we never take the time to cultivate our relationship with Jesus, our Savior.

Why do we fail to take the time and to make it a priority to sit in his presence and to listen to what he's got to say?

Maybe it's because we believe the Devils lie that to be an effect of Christian that we need to do many things and we need to ignore that one thing.

Let's look at how Jesus not only rebukes but now restores Martha. He points to Mary, a revealing posture.

[22 : 50] One of the most fascinating things about this passage is Mary never speaks because she's so consumed at listening to Jesus. It's a silent testimony.

I wonder does that sound too simple, too inactive for us busy people? We don't need to be busy to be effective or fruitful Christians. What we need to be is still and to listen.

And one of the things this passage really shows us and demonstrates to us is if we're going to love the Lord our God with all our being then we need that posture of dependence, that posture when we're on our knees close to our Saviour's heart.

The surprising thing about Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, in that day and age it would have never been allowed. If a Pharisee had walked into that house that day and seen Mary at the feet of Jesus he'd have said get up and get into that kitchen now.

Culturally it was just unacceptable. But Jesus, his priority is to teach his children, raises a status of woman and says sit at my feet and listen to me so that you can learn and so that you can grow and so that you can become like me.

[24 : 08] After all that is his purpose in our life to conform us to his image. And you know it's only after that we sit and be still and listen to him that we're able to stand up and to go and to serve him.

And that is only as the overflow of our hearts and the overflow of our love for him. It's only when we actually delight ourselves in our Saviour that we can love our neighbour as ourself.

We can only do deeds of service when we've spent time in devotion. And the reason we spend this time at his feet is to become like him. It's to get the mind of Christ our Saviour living in us from day to day by his power and love controlling all we do and say.

It's so that the Word of God made well richly in our hearts from hour to hour so that all we see we triumph only through his power.

It's so that the love of Jesus will fill me as the waters fill the sea. Him exalting, us self abasing, this is victory.

[25 : 20] You want to know how to have a relationship with Jesus that is deep and meaningful. Spend time at his feet. Make that radical choice to remove the distractions, to be still, to open the dusty Bible that lies in your bedside, to cultivate that relationship with him and hear those words of Jesus in verse 42, marry his chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.

Friends, if we are going to be in a relationship with Jesus and live a meaningful life in this world to do what we're created to do and that's to reflect him, then we need to sit at his feet and to listen to what he has to say.

Let's pray. Father, we confess that so often we are so distracted and so worried and can be pulled in different directions.

We confess that so often we fail to love you with all our hearts, minds, soul, body and strength. And Lord, we come to you this night and we thank you for this passage, which is a reminder that your Son wants to restore us.

And then in this passage, he shows us just what it is to do the one thing that is needed. Lord, may we go from here and may we be able to understand the words of the psalmist that better is one day in your presence than a thousand elsewhere.

[27 : 01] Lord, help us to have hearts that are captivated by you and your glory. Help us as we spend time in your presence to go forth from here carrying the aroma and the fragrance of Christ.

And as we love you with all our being, that we may love our neighbour as ourself and that we may, Father, be those objects, instruments in your hand and that we may be able to share and testify of Christ in our life.

We thank you that there is nothing that compares to knowing and loving Him. In His name we pray, Amen.