

This morning, we are in the 20th week of a sermon series that I have entitled “Meeting Jesus.” I have been making my way this year through Luke’s account of the life of Jesus, looking at various interactions that people had with Jesus, in order to better understand what it means to know and follow Him. This morning, we will be in Luke 10:38-42, looking at an interaction that Jesus had with two sisters, Mary and Martha.

Luke 10:38-42 - As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But 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, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

This is one of those short stories that at first I thought about skipping, but as I reflected upon the story, I realized just how relevant and absolutely critical it is to take to heart in this day and age, and just how life-changing it would be if we actually obeyed what Jesus was saying here. Because, at its heart, this is a story about **attention, distraction, and prioritization**, subjects that are increasingly relevant to our lives.

The setup is pretty simple. Jesus and his disciples are hosted on their journey by a family that includes at least two sisters, Mary and Martha. These sisters are also going to show up in John 11 when their brother Lazarus dies, and in John 12, when Mary anoints Jesus with an expensive perfume, angering Judas. As Jesus teaches the gathered crowd, Mary sits at Jesus’ feet listening to what he is saying. The expression “sitting at Jesus’ feet” is a technical term for a disciple – to sit at a teacher’s feet is to take the posture of a disciple, someone who wants to learn and submit to the teaching of the rabbi. Mary is ready to listen, learn, believe, and obey whatever it is Jesus has to teach.

Before we move on to Martha, it is instructive to recognize just how counter-cultural and revolutionary this was. The public room is where the men met; the kitchen belonged to the women. But Mary is with the men, and Jesus welcomes and honors her. And as we will see throughout the gospel, although the inner group of 12 apostles are all men, Jesus welcomes both men and women as His disciples. Some rabbis permitted women to study the Torah, but forbade them to sit at their feet for formal instruction. Jesus, however, encouraged it.

In verse 40, we are introduced to Martha, who we are told was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. In other words, she wants to hear what Jesus has to say, but is feeling the weight of hospitality, and so she is not able to fully attend to Jesus and his teaching. As her sister Mary gives her full attention to Jesus, Martha bears the full weight of the food preparation and other responsibilities, and grows increasingly frustrated, eventually interrupting Jesus to say, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” She is so agitated that she has the audacity to instruct Jesus to tell Mary to help her out.

As Charles Spurgeon put it, “Her fault was not that she served. The condition of a servant well becomes every Christian. Her fault was that she grew ‘cumbered with much serving,’ so that she forgot him and only remembered the service.”

But Jesus replies in v. 41: “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things,⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Notice that Jesus does not denigrate Martha’s service of hospitality, for indeed, it arises out of a place of love and a desire to honor Jesus and his disciples. But he tells her that what is most important to him is not that she gives him food or drink or whatever other services she wishes to render, but that she be with Him and listen to what He has to say. After all, he probably didn’t pass through often. He tells her that her sister Mary, who is sitting at his feet as a disciple, has chosen what is better, and he will not instruct her to go serve. He uses the term for portion (she has chosen the better portion), the Hebrew word *merida*, which is also used as a meal. She has chosen the better meal, to feast on His eternal Word, imagery that is used often by Jesus:

Matthew 4:4 - Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

John 4:32,34 - But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about... My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”

There is something more satisfying than food, and it is to hear and obey the Word of God. And so, Jesus gently rebukes Martha and honors Mary for her choice to sit at His feet as His disciple. What are the implications for us today?

1) The stress and distractions of life will kill your soul

Luke 10:40-42 - But 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, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Martha, instead of choosing to sit at the feet of Jesus, takes on the responsibility of hospitality. And as she focuses on that and sees her sister’s lack of help, look at what happens to her. She becomes angry, bitter, resentful of her sister, and brash towards Jesus. And Jesus gently lets her know that although she is worried and upset about many things, the only thing she really needed to concern herself with during his visit was spending time with Him and listening to His teaching.

We live in a stressed-out, hurried culture. Most of us are always in a hurry, and perpetually distracted from what really matters. In his book “The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry,” John Mark Comer references the new term Hurry sickness, which is defined as “a behavior pattern characterized by continual rushing and anxiousness.” “a malaise in which a person feels chronically short of time and so tends to perform every task faster and to get flustered when encountering any kind of delay.”

Sound familiar? Unfortunately, as human beings in this world, we have limits, and the to-do list is never done.

And not only are we so often hurried and stressed, we are also perpetually distracted from what really matters, adding to our lack of time. It has been said that we live in an **attention economy**. The thing that is the most valuable to companies is your attention. They have created their apps and programs in such a way as to keep your attention for as long as possible, so that they can sell your attention to advertisers. And as a result, instead of giving your attention to those things which should be priorities, like God, or family, or service to others, or personal holiness, our attention goes to Netflix, and sports, and games, and social media, and any number of other lesser priorities. How are you doing with this battle?

The stress and distractions of life will kill your soul. Like Martha, they will pull you away from Jesus and the priority of listening to and obeying His Word and

following Him, and will leave you worried and upset about many things, angry and bitter.

In Luke 8, Jesus shared a parable about how his teaching is like seed that is sown by a farmer. Some of the seed, he says, fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plant.

Luke 8:14–15 – “The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.”¹⁵ But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”

Think about how often this is true of us – we hear God’s Word preached or we read it in our devotional time, but it does not take root and grow to maturity within us because we allow it to be choked by life’s worries, riches, and pleasures. The stress and distractions of life kill our soul as we run after lesser priorities.

Matthew 16:24–26 - Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

Even when we try to rest, we are still restless, because we are so stressed and addicted to distraction.

As L.B. Cowman wrote in her 1939 devotional book “Springs in the Valley,” “In the deep jungles of Africa, a traveler was making a long trek. Coolies had been engaged from a tribe to carry the loads. The first day they marched rapidly and went far. The traveler had high hopes of a speedy journey. But the second morning these jungle tribesmen refused to move. For some strange reason they just sat and rested. On inquiry as to the reason for this strange behavior, the traveler was informed that they had gone too fast the first day, and that they were now waiting for their souls to catch up with their bodies.” Mrs. Cowman concludes with this penetrating insight: “This whirling rushing life which so many of us live does for us what that first march did for those poor jungle tribesmen. The difference: they knew what they needed to restore life’s balance; too often we do not.”

We need our soul to catch up with our body.

2) Time with Jesus and following Him will bring life to your soul

How does time with Jesus bring life to your soul?

a) He gives you power to help you carry your burdens.

Luke 10:38-39 - As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

Mary took the posture of a disciple. A rabbi had a yoke, a teaching, a way of understanding the Torah and how to live life in a way that honors God and brings life.

Matthew 11:28-30 - "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

His yoke is easy. Life is hard, but Jesus offers a way to carry it that brings a lightness, for we are carrying it with God, with His strength and not on our own. Aren't you tired of living life in your own strength? Why would Jesus tell Martha that the priority is to be with Him and take on His yoke, following Him? One reason is because when we do that, we meet the burdens of this world with God's power and strength. Even Billy Graham, when reflecting upon his life and how busy and overextended his ministry schedule had been, said this:

"If I had to do it all over again, I would speak less and study more... I would spend more time in prayer... I would spend more time studying the Bible and meditating on its truth..."

Stop working in your own strength. There is supernatural strength available to you if you would only come to Jesus.

John 15:5 - "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Philippians 2:12-13 - Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out

your salvation with fear and trembling,¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Isaiah 30:15 - This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.”

He will empower you for the service you have to do, for the responsibilities you have. You will not have to do them in your own strength, but you can do them in the power of the Lord.

The danger is that if you keep serving in your own strength, you will burn out or fall morally. Your character, the person you are, matters more than what you do. As Robert Murray M'Cheyne, Scottish pastor and preacher said, “My people’s greatest need is my personal holiness... It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.”

Never let yourself become too busy to sit at Jesus’ feet. **Time with the Lord is not another to-do on the list; it is not something you do for Him, but it is putting yourself in position for Him to do for you;** to love you, feed your soul, empower you, give you His peace, His joy, His rest, His wisdom.

b) He promises to take care of your needs and worries

Jesus promises that when we come to him, the many things that we are worried about will be taken care of.

Matthew 6:25–34 - “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a **single hour to your life?**²⁸ And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or **‘What shall we wear?’**³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these

things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Jesus acknowledges that Martha was worried and upset about many things, and he knows that you have many worries. And he tells us to seek Him first and that he will take care of our anxieties and needs.

Psalm 23 - The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Whatever your anxieties are, the Lord has a promise to bring rest and peace to your soul. God will provide. God has accepted us. God promises to love us to the end. He has promises that address our anxieties.

c) He calls you into a life-giving relationship, not to religion

At its heart, this is a relationship, not a religion. It is not about doing for God, it is about knowing Him and living in a relationship with Him where you are loved and empowered and blessed by Him.

John 17:3 – “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

Eternal life, life to the full, is knowing God. Why do we prioritize time with Him? Because at its heart, this life is about knowing God, about a life-giving relationship with Jesus, and no relationship grows or flourishes without spending time together.

Philippians 3:7–14 - But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God **on the basis of faith**. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow,

attaining to the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet **to have taken hold of it**. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Yes, service matters. But what is most important is time with Him.

What does this look like in practice?

Spend quiet time in solitude with Him, in His Word, in worship, in prayer.

Take Him with you. Brother Lawrence – practicing the presence of God. Seek to live your life Coram Deo – in the presence of God, taking Him with you in your ordinary tasks, living in constant communion with God.

Genesis 28:16 - When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.”

Take Sabbath as you can. He gives us the gift of Sabbath to remind us that we are not God. Sometimes we need a digital Sabbath, a break from our phone. Might start by not even bringing it into church. It is silently calling your name. I’ve got something for you!

Put some of these passages in prominent places in your home, even on your own phone. You are anxious and worried about many things, but only one thing is necessary.