

The Heart and Hands of Serving

Luke 10:38-42

We are continuing in our sermon series through Luke's gospel and our focus this morning is a short account of an important lesson given by Jesus to some very close friends of his at the end of chapter 10.

Now, we know that a major part of the Christian life is service. Christians are to be a serving people. We serve the Lord and we serve others. We serve those in the church and those outside the Church. And we serve because we are to reflect Jesus, who came to serve us. In fact, I've heard countless times in sermons or bible lessons the saying, "You're never more like Jesus than when you are serving." And that may be true. Jesus came to serve us and now we serve Him and others.

But if we are not careful, taken to an extreme, we may begin to develop an unhealthy view of Christian service. Maybe you've seen this or felt this, that the true measure of your Christian life is how much you serve. That your relationship with Christ is distilled down to nothing more than your work for Him. In other words, its the view that as long as your hands and your feet are active, then you are demonstrating a life of vibrant faith in close relationship with Christ.

However, in our passage today we will learn that there is more to the Christian life than just active hands. They are important but as we will see, they are not primary. So we are going to refresh ourselves this morning by regaining a biblical view of the heart and hands of serving.

We are going to be picking up where we left off in verse 38.

I. CONTEXT - v. 38-40a

Luke 10:38-40a

38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. **39** And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. **40** But Martha was distracted with much serving.

Luke doesn't give us a ton of details in this passage regarding the context. We don't know who exactly "they" were in verse 38. Who went with Jesus? All the disciples? Just a few? Did he mean that all of those 72 went their separate ways? We don't know but they really aren't the focus here.

Luke tells us that Jesus entered into a village, without telling us exactly which village. However we can figure it out by learning whose home he entered. Jesus enters the home of Martha and her sister Mary, who we know from other accounts in the gospels lived in the town of Bethany.

Martha and Mary are significant people in the life of Jesus. They, along with their brother Lazarus who if you remember Jesus raised from the dead, were dear friends of Jesus. In fact John tells us in John 11:5...

John 11:5

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

It was a love for them that caused Jesus to weep upon hearing that Lazarus had died even though he knew he would raise him from the dead. Again these are dear friends.

And Luke tells us that in their home they were doing what we often do when we have guests over, they were enjoying a meal together. And for this meal Martha took the lead in preparing, serving, and presumably cleaning up while her sister Mary gave her full attention to Jesus.

This scene of teaching around a meal has taken different shapes throughout history. You might know of the great Reformer, Martin Luther. Luther would regularly have people over to his home and around the dinner table would discuss theology and the Scriptures. It would be known as "Table Talk." A more modern example would be Francis Schaeffer who, along with his wife, opened their home in Switzerland to host anyone who would like to gather over a meal and discuss theology and philosophy.

And there, in the home of Martha and Mary, Jesus was teaching but it seems only Mary was listening.

Now it is easy to come down hard on Martha here. I mean, come on, Jesus is in your home and you aren't paying attention because you are more consumed with the dishes than with God in the flesh! And there is some truth to that we will see, but we have to remember that it is good and right to show hospitality. She was doing what she was expected to do. She was serving. In fact, we are to do the same.

Romans 12:13

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

1 Peter 4:9-10

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace

So that is exactly what Martha is trying to do. She is trying to show hospitality, trying to use her gift of her home and a table where others can gather around and enjoy conversation.

And while Martha is busy serving, Luke tells us that Mary is sitting and listening to Jesus teach. And though Martha is busy in the kitchen we shouldn't miss this powerful scene in the dining room. The posture of sitting at a teacher's feet signaled submission. A disciple would sit at their rabbi's feet humbly seeking to learn from them. And here is Mary sitting humbly, ready to hear from Jesus. And further we should note the counter-cultural actions of Jesus here. You see, women were never disciples of rabbis. That was a role only for men. Yet, Jesus welcomes Mary as his disciple. And so this is a great moment to remind ourselves of the importance of women to Jesus. Women, you are called and welcomed to deep discipleship, to study, to learn, to become theologians of the highest degree. Don't neglect the open invitation to grow as a thinking disciple of Jesus.

II. CONFLICT - v. 40b

So, that's our scene. Jesus in the home of Martha and Mary, Martha trying to be hospitable while Mary sits and learns from Jesus. But then we see that a frustration had been growing in the heart of Martha until she just couldn't ignore it anymore...

Luke 10:40b

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."

First of all, it is kind of humorous that she addresses him as "Lord" and then proceeds to rebuke him and order him to do something. That is not how we relate to the Lord Jesus Christ to say the least.

But she is angry. She's angry at her sister. Really, we are witnessing a scene of sibling rivalry.

Now, full disclosure, I do not have any siblings. I am an only child. I know, many of you are rolling your eyes right now thinking of how spoiled I am. But what can I say? That was not my call to make. But most of my friends growing up had siblings. And spending time with them I witnessed a lot of the rivalry that is common in families. However, even though I have no siblings in my immediate earthly family, I have many brothers and sisters in my spiritual family. You see, it is a common experience to speak of rivalry that exists among biological brothers and sisters but it is equally valid to speak of the rivalries that can exist between brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Bible teaches that when we repent of our sin and put our faith in Christ we are adopted into God's family. We receive God as our Father and all others who have expressed repentant faith as our siblings.

Rivalry here is something that I think we all have experienced at some point in our lives. And we can see where Martha went wrong in her serving Jesus and how we go wrong so many times as well.

A. Distraction

The text says that she was “distracted by much serving.” That word in the Gr. carries with it the idea of being pulled or dragged away. She was pulled away from Jesus because of the duties she felt were her responsibility. And because of that she gave them a higher priority than spending time with Jesus.

This happens to us so often in our Christian activity. We become so busy in our serving, whether that is at church, in our community, or in our families, that we become overwhelmed by the sense of responsibilities. And while our to-do lists continue to grow to unmanageable lengths, we neglect other important things, namely our own relationship with Christ. And what is so difficult is that even when we realize it, we find it hard to scale back on serving because then we just feel guilty for serving less and not more. But we must guard ourselves from becoming distracted in our relationships with Christ, even from good things like service for Christ.

B. Self-Pity

But notice what happens when our distraction goes unchecked. Martha experiences self-pity. She wallows in the fact that she is alone in her service. Again, this happens so often when we get overwhelmed and distracted. We begin to feel like we are the only ones making sacrifices to serve and eventually we begin to feel sorry for ourselves.

Dr. Philip Ryken diagnoses the problem of self-pity by saying, “Soon we have stopped serving Jesus at all. We are serving ourselves, and thinking only about what our ministry is or is not doing for us.”¹

C. Resentment

But then notice the natural outcome of being distracted and wallowing in self-pity. Martha becomes resentful, that is, she becomes bitter, thinking she has been treated unfairly. And to be honest she is resentful towards BOTH Mary and Jesus. She resents Mary for not helping out but she resents Jesus for not making Mary help. She sees Jesus as part of the problem!

This happens to us as well. In our self-righteousness it is easy to think that everyone must be serving Jesus in the same way we do. We assume that everyone must have the same priority in ministry as us, and we resent others for not making our ministry their priority.

Dr. Kent Hughes observes, “There is a tendency for people who are wound tight like Martha to give everything to their particular area of calling or interest and to allow that interest to so dominate their lives that they have little time to let God’s Word speak to

¹ Ryken, *Luke*, vol. 1, 557.

them. Without the benefit of the Word, they adopt a mindset of narrowness, judgmentalism, or fault-finding. And eventually the creativity and vitality they once gave their area of ministry sours.”²

Again, this conflict we witness here between Martha and Mary is a conflict that we will all probably experience in our desire to serve Christ. But we must be on guard and hold to proper priorities. We see this in Jesus’ gentle correction to Martha...

III. CORRECTION - v. 41-42

Luke 10:41-42

41 But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, **42** but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

As a friend, and our gentle Lord, Jesus corrects Martha and defends Mary. And from Jesus’ words, I want to point out what I think are 3 very important lessons regarding our service.

1. Your *heart* of service is more important than your *act* of service.

Again, Martha is not rebuked for showing hospitality. That is not in question here. She is being gently counseled by Jesus concerned for the anxiety that she is experiencing in her service.

So please catch, this is not a story that sets up the contemplative life as the correct life against the active life as the wrong life. Ryken, again, notes “every Martha needs a prayer life, and every Mary is called to serve.”³ That is not the concern here.

The concern here is the heart behind Martha’s service. And the concern for everyone of us is our heart behind our acts of service. In other words while we often think about and focus on our hands, we need to give attention to our hearts.

Ultimately, we should be asking ourselves, why do we serve? Out of worship? Out of love, for God and others? Or out of love for self?

We should be regularly diagnosing our emotions as we serve. Am I experiencing joy in my service or am I overwhelmed with anxiety?

And if I am experiencing anxiety in my service, why is that? What might that tell me about my motivation for serving? Am I anxious to prove myself to God? Anxious because I am most concerned about my reputation, in this case proving myself to others? Anxious because I feel like I have to do everything, that somehow the existence of the kingdom of God is dependent on my abilities and my sacrifice?

² Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, vol. 1, 398.

³ Ryken, 562.

Each one of those possibilities demonstrates that the heart behind our service is skewed.

If we are anxious to prove ourselves to God, then we've forgotten the gospel. It is easy to allow our Christian activity to become the basis of our Christian identity. But understand that this is simply a gospel of works. This is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. In our service we must guard ourselves from thinking that we are earning righteousness before God and others. If we don't this will produce pride and joyless service, done out of mere obligation rather than love.

If we are anxious to prove ourselves to others then we are no longer serving God but ourselves.

If we are anxious because we feel like we have to do everything, then we've lost sight of who God is and who we are. If I'm being transparent, this is what I've probably struggled most with in my life and ministry.

I remember in Bible college a book came out called *Don't Waste Your Life* by John Piper. It was a call to give your life to eternal things and not trivial, temporary things in this world. I remember I had already felt that desire in my heart, that was why I was in Bible College and then I read that book and it only enhanced my desire to make the most of all of my life. I didn't, and still don't, want to look back and see that I've wasted my life. And while I still agree with the premise of that book, for those of us who already want to serve, if we are not careful, we will heap duty upon duty on ourselves out of fear that we aren't doing enough. But that is driven either by pride or guilt, both are unhealthy motivations leading to unhealthy attitudes.

We have to understand that God is clear, He is not interested in your acts of service that are not driven by a heart of worship for Him.

Hosea 6:6

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Again, your heart of service is more important than your acts of service. That doesn't mean that service is not important by any means. We are called to serve, but our hearts must be prioritized over our hands.

2. Our proper heart of service is guarded by our priority of time with Jesus.

Jesus tells Martha, "only one thing is necessary." In other words, "Your busyness is not wrong. But it is not best."⁴ What is best is to spend time with Jesus.

In fact Jesus describes this with the phrase "the good portion," which is a little bit of a wordplay seeing that the context of their conversation was around the dinner table.

⁴ DeYoung, *Crazy Busy*, 116.

What Jesus meant was that of all things we need in this life, what we need most is to spend time with our Savior, in His Word and in prayer. This what is said in Deuteronomy 8 and later quoted by Jesus during his temptation in the desert...

Deuteronomy 8:3

...man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

The warning for us, is that if we are not diligent in regularly spending time with Jesus, again, in His Word and in prayer, we will be unable to serve in a way that is healthy for us and glorifying for the Lord.

Paul Tripp wrote a book a number of years ago called *Dangerous Calling*, and it was written specifically for those of us who serve as pastors. And in it he warns pastors about the common pitfalls and dangers that ministry brings and how we can be on guard to not let those things derail us from faithfully serving the Lord. Again, it was aimed at pastors but much of it applies to anyone who desires to serve Christ in any area.

One of the main points of the book is this very idea. The idea that our time of personal worship is absolutely indispensable to our ministry. And he explains why,

Your private devotional life has the power to kill you like nothing else does. By 'kill you,' I mean that it has the power to kill the 'me-ism' that is inside you (and me) that will again and again cause you to be in the way of, rather than part of, whatever it is that God is doing at the moment. Private personal worship is an effective tool of grace in the hands of God to kill those things in you that must die in order that you be what you have been called to be and do what you have been appointed to do in your place of ministry.⁵

The point he's making is that just as we have been called to deny ourselves as followers of Jesus, spending time in personal worship will kill us, so to speak, by giving us an accurate view of God and accurate view of ourselves. Without time spent with Jesus those views will become conflated and we will end up serving ourselves rather than God.

Again, priority must be given to spending time with Jesus.

Now, I know that hearing that we need to spend more time with the Lord might actually sound burdensome for some. If you are prone to be driven to action and accomplishment, then when you hear the reminder that you need to spend time with Jesus each day, it will feel to you like nothing more than something else on the to-do list. Just one more task to add onto the already crushing weight of the responsibilities in your life. However, I want to challenge your perspective on that. One commentator notes, "Je-

⁵ Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, 190.

sus is not asking for something more from us; he is asking for less, so that he can give us more of himself.”⁶

It is ok, in fact, it is more than ok, *it is necessary*, for you to take time each day and spend it with your Savior.

I like what pastor and author Kevin DeYoung says about this, “It’s not wrong to be tired. It’s not wrong to feel overwhelmed. It’s not wrong to go through seasons of complete chaos. What is wrong - and heartbreakingly foolish and wonderfully avoidable - is to live a life with more craziness than we want because we have less Jesus than we need.”⁷

Don’t neglect sitting at the feet of Jesus so that you can wash more dishes in the kitchen. One thing is necessary. If you want hands that are fruitful make sure your heart is healthy.

3. Once again, we serve Jesus only because we have been served by Jesus in the gospel.

Just consider, Martha’s opportunity to serve Jesus happened only because Jesus came to her home. And it the same for us. We are given the privilege to serve with Jesus but that is a gift of His grace.

Because Jesus came and laid down His own glory and took on flesh, living the life we never could, and dying the death that we deserve, Jesus served us in the greatest way possible. He met the greatest need we had and now, in response, we go out and serve Him. And that, not to earn His love, not to earn His acceptance, but in worshipful response to our Savior who came to serve and not be served.

So, in those moments when your hands are active but you recognize that your heart has become calloused, reflect on the gospel again.

CONCLUSION

So let me encourage you this morning to do a sort of wellness check on both your hands and your heart.

Are your hands active for Christ? How are you serving Him? How are you serving others? How are you serving your church body? Remember service is both a way of reflecting Christ and the means to become more Christ-like.

How about your heart? Ask yourself some tough questions. If you aren’t serving others, ask yourself why not? If you are serving, ask *why* you are serving? Are you experiencing anxiety in your service? Have you experienced distraction, self-pity, or bitterness like Martha?

⁶ Ryken, 563.

⁷ DeYoung, 118.

Are you daily sitting at the feet of Jesus, giving yourself to His teaching? If not, what needs to change so that He has the priority that He deserves in your life?

These are tough questions to ask at times, but they are necessary to develop hearts and hands that serve the Lord and others with gospel joy.

VERSES

Luke 10:38-40a

John 11:5

Romans 12:13

1 Peter 4:9-10

Luke 10:40b

Luke 10:41-42

Hosea 6:6

Deuteronomy 8:3

SERMON GUIDE

A major part of the Christian life is serving. We serve God and we serve others. But we must be careful to not have a focus on the work of our hands over and above the health of our hearts. At the end of Luke 10, Jesus visits Martha and Mary who offers this lesson when Martha expresses frustration in her service.

I. Context

Jesus is at the home of Martha and Mary. Martha is showing hospitality, busy serving them. Meanwhile, her sister Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus learning from His teaching.

How do you feel about hospitality? If you love hosting others in your home, why? If you don't, why not?

Discuss what it meant for Jesus to allow Mary to sit at his feet while He taught.

II. Conflict

Martha had it. She was upset that she was busy serving while Mary lazily sat around the house. Martha rebukes Jesus and asks Him to make Mary help her.

A. Distraction

Have you ever felt so busy that you felt like you didn't have the time to spend

with Jesus?

B. Self-Pity

Have you ever reached the point of feeling sorry for yourself in your service to God or others? How did you work through that?

C. Resentment

Have you ever been in a state of bitterness, or seen bitterness in others, because you/they thought everyone should be about their ministry?

III. Correction

1. Your *heart* of service is more important than your *act* of service.

Why is this the case?

Are you experiencing distraction, self-pity, or resentment in your service now? Why might that be?

2. Our proper heart of service is guarded by our priority of time with Jesus.

Looking at the way you spend your time, would you say that you give priority to your time in Scripture and prayer? Could you say that you have chosen the “good portion” and the “one thing necessary” in the day?

What is pulling you away from the priority of Jesus?

3. We serve Jesus only because we have been served by Jesus in the gospel.

Discuss how Jesus served us in the gospel. Why should that be the impetus for our serving Him?