

Worship and Work

Luke 10:38–42 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION/CONTEXT: The text we are looking at today is fairly familiar - it is the story of Jesus' visit to the home of **Mary and Martha**. At first glance, we are tempted to read it as a story that has a good guy and a bad guy, or perhaps I should say a good gal and a bad gal.

Martha is preoccupied with serving. In contrast, Mary is sitting and learning at Jesus' feet. The implication seems to be, at first glance, that we should be Mary, not Martha.

But remember the context - this story comes immediately after the parable of the story of the good neighbor, where one of the major points was that we are not to be so preoccupied with other things, that we are not willing to stop and help someone in need. In other words, ***the hero was the servant.***

Today's text portrays Martha, the busy, hard-working servant, as the one Jesus corrects and Mary, sitting and learning, as the hero.

YET, I am convinced that the story is NOT that simple. It is not a story of good versus bad, but rather - a story of misaligned and misappropriated priorities and the dangers if they go unchecked.

TEXT: Luke 10:38–42 (ESV)

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.

Jesus didn't go into just any house. Remember the instructions he gave to the 72 when they were sent out? When you approach a home, speak a blessing over it, and only enter if your peace rests upon that house. So we can imagine that Jesus took his own counsel. He entered the home of Martha because he had a peace about it. That is a huge vote of confidence about this woman, Martha.

- We know, according to **John 11–12**, Mary and Martha lived in Bethany, a small village that lies on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives.¹ Their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus would later raise from the dead, also lived in this same village.
- Mary, Martha, and Lazarus had a unique relationship with Jesus. They were certainly followers, but more than that, they were great friends. This may explain some of the liberties Martha takes in her conversation with Jesus, interrupting him in the middle of his teaching.

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.

NOW, let me show you a few things we can deduce from a simple reading of the text, combined with what we know historically about the region and culture.

We are told that the house belonged to Martha.

- We might assume this is a large home if Martha could host Jesus and His disciples as well as her own family. Most theologians agree that Jesus traveled with as many as 30 in His entourage.
- Bethany was somewhat of an exclusive area to live, in the hills surrounding Jerusalem. Thus, we might assume that Martha was a wealthy woman.
- Since her name is mentioned first, and the house belongs to her - we can assume that Martha is the older of the two sisters.
- No husband is ever mentioned, so it could be that they have not yet married, or it could be that they are widowed.

Hosting a group of this size would require that rooms be made ready, meals would need to be prepared, and ladies, you know that it is incredible what you can accomplish around the house under the threat of someone coming over.

So far, so good - Martha is presented as an incredible woman, not a villain.

Martha demonstrates hospitality, initiative, generosity, work ethic, and godliness (in the fact that Jesus stayed in her home).

So understand that up front. This is a good woman. This is a NT version of a Proverbs 31 woman in many ways.

YET, like so many of you here today - ***there is a danger of NEGLECTING WORSHIP for the sake of WORK.***

By worship, I mean cultivating your relationship with God, through daily time in the Word and prayer...sitting in His presence and allowing Him to teach you.

ILLUSTRATION: When it comes to marriage we speak of the 4 D's - **dialogue** daily, **date** weekly, **depart** quarterly, and **deport** annually. In other words, you have to be intentional about your RELATIONSHIP or else your marriage will devolve into more of a business arrangement.

The same thing is true in your relationship with God. It requires regular times of intentional worship, disconnecting from everything else to be in His presence daily, gathering with one another weekly, even investing in spiritual retreats like our Revelation Tour coming up this Fall.

Spiritual health doesn't just happen - it is the result of careful and intentional cultivation.

Certainly, sinful things can draw us away from that intentionality. But what we see in this text is that **good things can also subtly replace the best things.**

The enemy isn't particular about what draws you away from intentional times with the Lord. He can use drugs, alcohol, partying, OR he is perfectly content to use Christian service.

That is what is happening with Martha - **she was serving her soul away.** So that even when the Son of God was teaching the Word in her living room... she was missing out.

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." 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."

I want to show you FOUR dangers of working without worshipping....

1. Work without worship divides our priorities.

40 But Martha was **distracted** with much serving.

The idea here is that there was a very real part of Martha that knew she needed to put down the dishrag and listen to Jesus. She even wanted to do so... but other things divided her attention.

But she was distracted... We live in what could be called the **DISTRACTED GENERATION.**

ILLUSTRATION: Let's do an experiment... take out your phone and power it down.

The physicians who publish the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders are considering adding to the list of phobias a new disorder called, "**NOMOPHOBIA**". That is the fear of not being about to check your phone.

Emotional symptoms include:

- worry, fear, or panic when you think about not having your phone or being unable to use it, anxiousness and agitation if you have to put your phone down or know you won't be able to use it for a while, panic or anxiety if you briefly can't find your phone

Physical symptoms include:

- tightness in your chest, trouble breathing normally, trembling or shaking, increased sweating, feeling faint, dizzy, or disoriented, rapid heartbeat

There are times when it is fine to multi-task, maybe check your messages, but if you begin to do that when you should be in God's presence focused on Him, it is a recipe for disaster.

James 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ “he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

Martha was experiencing spiritual ADD - Attention Deficit Disorder.

You see, we are designed to WORSHIP FIRST, then WORK.

Our WORK for God is to be done as an overflow of our LOVE for God.

If we get that out of order, everything falls apart.

Work without worship divides our priorities...

2. Work without worship distorts our view of God

40b. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, **do you not care** that my sister has left me to serve alone?”

When our hearts and our priorities are divided, we inevitably begin to **incriminate God**.

Remember what Jesus taught in **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ “**No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.**”

NOTICE: When the heart gets set on one thing, it hates the other. It doesn't move back and forth between affections easily.

ILLUSTRATION: When a man tells me he no longer loves his wife, my first question is - who then do you love? Almost without exception, when a man develops an emotional relationship with another woman, he will begin to incriminate his wife subtly. He is usually oblivious to this happening. But that is the nature of the human soul.

In the same way - if you do not keep your priorities right with God and your relationship up to date... you will begin to think negatively of Him.

In fact, Martha begins to tell Jesus what He ought to do....

40c. “Tell her then to help me.”

Like Peter, when Jesus spoke of the cross, pulling Jesus aside to set Him straight... in that instance, Jesus said, “Get thee behind me, Satan.”

How foolish of us to advise, much less command, the omniscient King of Glory... but that happens when you work without worship.

Work without worship divides our priorities...

Work without worship distorts our view of God....

3. Work without worship decreases our emotional health

⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.”

First, he begins with the double stating of her name. That indicates His tone. This was not a severe or harsh rebuke but rather a loving reproof. It's like He hugged her as He said what he did.

“Dear child... you are anxious and troubled about so many things...”

The words anxious and troubled speak of an inward problem that overflowed to an outward problem.

It literally means her mind was pulled in many directions, and her life was pulled in many directions as a result.

Also, notice, by Martha's estimation, ***the problem was MARY***, and if Jesus would only fix MARY, everything would be fine. But everything would not be fine. If Jesus scolded MARY and told her to get to work, it would not be long until Martha would be frustrated with Lazarus, Peter, or someone else.

In fact, if you come to church really concerned about how someone else is serving the Lord, that is a good sign that you may have made an IDOL out of your service, and you may be worshipping WORK rather than CHRIST.

I wonder how many of you can relate to that? I certainly can.

- As you drove to church this morning what was your mind on? Preparing to gather with God's people? Worshipping and honoring Christ in song?
- As we worshipped as a congregation this morning, were you focused on Christ? Or were you focused on how you looked? What is happening after church? Other people?
- What about as I preach this sermon? Are you captivated by the preaching of the Word? Or is your mind somewhere else?

If your heart and mind are pulled in many directions - your life will soon follow.

Jesus is not MAD at you; if He were here, He would give you a hug, call you by name, and say... “There is a better way”.

*Work without worship divides our priorities ...
Work without worship distorts our view of God....*

Work without worship decreases our emotional state...

4. Work without worship deprives us of our greatest resource

⁴²“but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

While Mary focused on Jesus, sat at His feet, and listened, Jesus dealt with Martha on her behalf. If you will focus on Christ, and seek Him - so many of the things you are concerned about, HE will take care of.

Matthew 6:33 (ESV)³³ “But seek **first** the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

C.S. Lewis, *“Put first things first, and we get second things thrown in: put second things first and we lose both first and second things.”*

ILLUSTRATION: A wise older pastor once told me, “Son, plan your calendar and give God your best time. If you do not do this, someone else is always willing to plan your calendar for you, and it will likely not include time with the Lord”.

That was sage advice. The very best thing I can do for my family, for you as a church, for my larger impact in the world... the single thing you need from me beyond all else is that I spend time in the Word and prayer every single day. If I do that, you will benefit. But, if I occupy myself with so much busy work that I skip my time with God, it will not be long until my whole world suffers.

IF THIS RESONATES WITH YOU, IF YOU SEE YOURSELF IN THIS TEXT, HERE ARE A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER:

1. **Create more margin** in your day by stopping some of the things you are currently doing. Remember, “No” is not a four-letter word.

Kevin DeYoung, Crazy Busy

“We don’t expect to be able to buy anything we want, because we know there is a limit to our money. But somehow we live as if time knew no bounds, when in fact time is much more limited than money. Wealth can be created, but no one has the ability to grow more time.”

2. **Stop asking, “What needs doing?”** and begin asking, “What does God want me to do?”

ILLUSTRATION: You’ve probably heard of the illustration that Stephen Covey made famous. A professor gave a student a jar and a bunch of rocks of various sizes and told the student to “put the rocks in the jar”. The student tried but could not fit them all in.

The professor then emptied the jar, put the biggest rocks in first, and the showed how the smaller rocks would now fit in perfectly. Remember the BIGGEST rock is WORSHIP.

3. **Honor the rhythm of the Sabbath and corporate worship.** God has called us to work 6 days, but rest one, to give intentional focus to cultivating His presence.
4. **Have a time and a place to meet with God** every single day. Design the space and sanctify it. Eliminate distractions. As you do this it will become your favorite place in all the world. In fact, I have been to Israel many times, but I am able to focus and worship my Lord better on my back porch than I am on the Mount of Olives.
5. **Teach others to do the same** - This story is only found in Luke's Gospel. How did it get in there? Well the Holy Spirit inspired Luke of course, but also remember Luke was NOT one of the 12. He came to faith later. He was paid by Theophilus to go interview people and get first-hand accounts. What does that mean? At some point, he likely spoke with Martha. I like to think by this time, she had learned to relax, she had prioritized her worship... and now, having repented, she shares this story with Luke.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: Remember, this all happened in the village of Bethany. Bethany means "The House of Happiness." Just a few miles away was Golgatha, which means, "the place of the skull or the place of death". We name our little girls Bethany; we don't name anything Golgatha.

Because Jesus Christ put you first on Golgatha, he calls you to put Him first each day of your life. That is the ONE THING... get that right, and everything else will follow.

As you do, your house will be a Bethany... a house of happiness.