



“AT THE FEET OF JESUS”

Luke 10:38-42

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisconsin
on Sunday April 2nd, 2017

Luke 10:38-42 Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. (39) And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. (40) But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." (41) And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. (42) "But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

To begin today, we must remark that this is often one of the great abused passages in scripture. For many will pull this passage out of its context in an attempt to provide a scriptural ‘free-pass’ to stand down from serving and for not living out the manifest of our redemption in the real world. Such occurs anytime when we approach scripture with preconceptions and a desire to find a verse to support our actions: when there is an attempt to pull a passage out of its context and torture it until it says what we want it to say. There are many such biblical passages. Take for an example the oft weaponized passages of Genesis 1:28 and 9:1. “*Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it..."*” (Genesis 1:28) “*So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."*” (Genesis 9:1)

These are the passages that are often used against those who do not have children to attempt to guilt them into reproductive repentance and to ‘reject their selfish ways.’ But there is a couple of problems there....*one*, both passages say “God said to *them*.” If you are going to apply the logic that every passage is speaking directly and unilaterally to each one of us, then I would ask why there isn’t a large boat in your back-yard that you built from scratch, and why you haven’t named all the animals? That’s not always a smoking gun to prove the lack of application, but let us look on!

God told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply (and to) *fill the earth*. This, of course, because *there wasn't anybody here!* Now there is today approximately 7.5 ***billion*** people on earth! I think we have indeed multiplied and ‘filled the earth.’ Today the populational stress has profoundly affected natural resources, prevalence of disease and starvation, crime, wars, and every social ill and angst on earth. So spare me the illicit use of scripture to verbally ‘spank’ me for my selfishness of having no children. And PS: often the choice to **have** a child is motivated by some of the most blatant and overt self-centered hearts on earth. And this isn’t the only passage like this! When we take scripture out of context and attempt to use it like the ace up our sleeve, a way to further our personal agenda, we not only do the whole of the Bible a disservice but it is dishonest and self-serving instead of “GOD serving!”

When we look at any scripture, it is important that we continually reflect as to the context of the chapter, *or chapters*, where it appears. Jesus has for some time been clearly teaching on the broad subject of a committed living out of our faith, answering the call of a disciple, and to *go* and to *do* for Christ and kingdom. Thus this passage, despite its often poor translational application, is not going to suddenly negate everything Christ has been saying. If Jesus has made a clear call in the previous verses as well as elsewhere in the gospels to live lives of discipleship and service, we must be very careful to not invalidate His words by squeezing this passage to provide a free pass of exemption!

However, we must also not over react by taking such a defensive posture that we also don't hear what He is indeed trying to say to us. We must not "throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater!" Clearly God has placed this passage strategically *here*, in this extended teaching on serving the Lord, just in the right place when we need to hear it most. Because while some of us may bristle at the oft historical mishandling of this text to serve personal agendas, we are also just as likely to have been so swept up in the last chapters events and teachings to have adopted now an all-consuming lifestyle of *doing* and *working*. And then usually doing so in a personal attempt to be a good little saluting soldier for Jesus and without any actual help from Him or the 'helper' Holy Spirit that He sent for just such a task!

God knew what He was doing in scripture. Not just *what* was said, but *how* it was said and furthermore, *when* it was said. We must be very careful to not become obsessed with the *movement* of discipleship, and thus fail in the *heart* of the discipleship! Let's look at the passage, and try to do so without agenda and with contextual considerations.

Firstly, Martha is often somewhat 'thrown under the bus' in the handling of this passage, as if she was a real idiot or a legalistic religionist. But truly there is nothing to give us that picture if we honestly approach the passage with an open heart and mind. Immediately we see in verse 38 that she "*welcomed Jesus into her home.*" Not only was such a giving and selfless act but it was a potential sacrifice and risk on her part, opening her up to all sorts of possible persecution and undesired community attention. Remember, this was not exactly a good time to stand up and be counted for Christ if you desired to keep a low profile and a safe living environment! Zaccheus' received Jesus into his home and did so "gladly" (chairo), but everyone caught flack for it. Jason was dragged before the city authorities and accused of welcoming Paul. Rahab the harlot risked her life when she received the Israeli spies in the Old Testament. **Matthew Henry** proposes "*Though it was expensive to entertain Christ, for he did not come alone, but brought his disciples with him, yet she would not regard the cost of it... Though at this time it was grown dangerous to entertain him, especially so near Jerusalem, yet she cared not what hazard she ran for his name's sake.*"

We also find that scripture elsewhere speaks of Jesus' love for Martha. She embodied a life and character of commitment, service, and friendship (John 11:5). So Jesus was not in any way dis'ing her in this passage...he was not scolding her as much as He was simply *teaching* her. But the fact was, Martha had become distracted by all the doing and forgot about all the 'being.' Like for so many of us, the work and the service became the focus instead of the One whom she served. She lost sight of that priority and the preliminary aspect of relationship with Christ. And inevitably she fell prey to the aggravation of watching others in joyous relationship with Christ while she labored in self-mandated constant service.

For Martha went on...*as everybody in such predicaments invariably do*, to become critical of those who were not doing as much as her. This is the journey of every struggling servant from Cain unto today. Legalists can't *stand* you grace-livers! You drive them crazy in jealousy and self-righteousness! They *want* what you have, but they can't bring themselves to surrender to the fact that God is not going to love the 'over-timer' more than anyone else! It's so American that we can't seem to let go of it. Our culture is profoundly built on earning our stance in community and vocation.

The ever present danger is that we will begin to think of ourselves as the standard. You know...if someone serves less than us they are a lazy spiritual slug, and if you attempt to serve more than me...well, you're just a confused and misguided legalist. We need to realize that Jesus is not being critical of spiritual work and kingdom service. Again, we must take scripture as a whole, and let the Bible be its own commentary firstly. The problem for Martha was that her service had taken on a ring of self-importance and self-pity. She became so consumed with what she was *doing* that she forgot *why she was doing it*. The work had become more important than the devotion for the one she was doing it for.

However we have no reason to believe that Martha was not still loving toward her Lord, if however misdirected. The text says that she had a sister that *also* sat learning at the feet of Jesus! So apparently Martha was not void of such commitment. Again, we can look at this passage and see it only in the extreme...a "one side or the other" scenario, but the truth in the story does not reflect that but rather tells of a misguided *priority*.

Often we think we will find a greater walk in Christ through service, but the fact is we find a greater service through a loving relational walk! The joy we experience...or the lack thereof, tells the story. That is not to mean that we will always serve in giddy glee and thrilling emotion. No, sometimes our service is hard, mundane, and even thankless. But when it is for CHRIST and HIS glory, we do so always with joy. It may be overly simplistic, but it seems that 'happiness' is effectively an emotional response while joy rises above such and serves as a state of being. A '*lifestyle*.' I "feel" happy, and I AM joyful!

Jesus recognized that Martha was "worried and troubled about many things." Martha had an *anxiety issue*. One can hardly blame her really. Can imagine if you were told that Jesus and maybe 100 of his entourage were coming by your house this afternoon? I mean, wouldn't you clean up a little? Pick your socks up off the living room floor and put on some coffee? But was this the extent of the situation? Or was Martha in fact "worried and troubled about many things" beyond having enough cookies for all those people? I think perhaps Martha had not yet come to that place in her life where Jesus was more than a famous prophet and teacher. He had not moved into the "God" position in her life.

The problem with our anxiety...especially in our obsessively anxious culture, is that such is subtle and sneaky. The truth is that it can all look so unselfish but really it is rooted in the opposite. Because our anxieties and worries are two-fold: *One*, it reflects an overt concern over how I am thought of and perceived by those around me. And *two*, it says I lack a critical aspect in the walk of Christianity, *faith*. Both are ME centered, and run contrary to a CHRIST centered relationship! This is why we are told that "without faith, it is impossible to please God."

Today we live in a very busy world. We are inundated with a variety of choices, paths, activities, and duties. But instead of having greater choices, we instead tend to load our plate with everything like a giant life smorgasbord, and stuffing ourselves with every activity we can squeeze in and every pursuit we can schedule. We have not learned to say 'no.' Invariably, Christ is lost in the shuffle, because we do not see Him as the priority...the *focus* of our new life. We attempt rather to *add* Him to our already hectic lives. It is simply the desire to have Jesus *and* the world. Martha meant well. She was not one of these spongy Christians who can do nothing but drink in. There are many whose sole conception of the Christian life is to hear. But not Martha...she was out in it.

Martha was not sinful or unloving. But she was "*distracted*." And in her distracted angst, she began to cop an attitude...one that should be very familiar to us. She was distracted by "much" serving and she wanted Jesus to demand that her sister be more like *her*, instead of more like *Him*. But that was not the only issue here. Later on, at the death of her brother Lazarus, we see Martha begin to doubt Jesus because He failed to act. After all, *she* was a woman of action and doing, so why was not Jesus responding in kind by acting and doing, and of course in the context of what she thought *ought* to happen and *should* be the outcome!

Much of the issue stems from really understanding the nature of service. Worship IS service! Our worship of Christ is truly the greatest thing we can offer Him. Because worship is the giving of *ourselves*. It is adoration and honor, but it is also the sacrifice, the service, the presentation of a humble self before an all-powerful God who loves and redeems us. This does not mean we are not to serve in action. It does not mean that we are to not *do*...not *act* our faith out for kingdom sake and advancement. But our *living* must always come out of our *loving*.

It is not...as we often think, a choice between the two. Our work service for God can indeed get in the way of our worship, but the problem is seldom the worship itself. Martha was "worried and anxious about many things." She was busy with life...with the world, just as we are, and it was *that* which kept her from being in the right place at the right time. We are called to be a worshipper which naturally leads us to be a servant/worker. The sacrifice that is made to be and do these things, is not the choice of one or the other, service or worship, but rather the business of the worldly activities, stress, anxieties, and pursuits that we are often unwilling to give up for a sanctified walk through life.

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law--justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. Matthew 23:23

Mary '*chose the better.*' Jesus was asked once why His apostles didn't fast like other people. Jesus replied that such a day would come, but on that day they were in in the presence of the bridegroom, and that called for a party, not a fast. Ecc 3:1 tells us that "*For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven.*" There is certainly a time to work and serve, but never at the expense of our worship. Never in lieu of relational interaction and adoration! Sometimes Jesus just wants to talk and hang out with us.

"Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed,
and be still" (Psalm 4:4)

"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD;
in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up" (Psalm 5:3)

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight,
O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14)