

Don't just do something. Sit there!

I. Martha's actions

II. Mary's choice

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

Tell me, have you ever marveled at the fact that the words in this book, the Bible, written between 2,000 and 3500 years ago, still have so much to say about our lives today? Even though these words were written in different languages than ours, about people living in different cultures than ours, still it speaks absolutely timeless truths that have application for all kinds of situations that we find ourselves in today. Now, granted, there are some passages that we may have a little harder time applying to our lives. For example, when Jesus says, "Suppose one of you has an ox that falls into a pit," you might be thinking, "Yeah, I've never owned an ox before. In fact, I'm not sure I know exactly what an ox is. And I've never known anybody who had leprosy. And the idea of Jesus driving a demon into a herd of pigs, I'm having a little trouble seeing how that applies to my life."

But the account that we have before us today is not in one of those categories. In fact, I'm not sure there is an event recorded in all of scripture that has a clearer application for our lives than this one in Luke chapter 10. It's like these words were written specifically for my life in 2022. Actually, when I read what transpired here in the home of a woman named Martha, I'm reminded of something that someone might say in a moment of exasperation, as kind of a call to action. For example, if your teenage son is sitting on his bed complaining that he doesn't have any clean socks to wear, all while he's surrounded by piles of dirty laundry, you might say, what? "Well, don't just sit there, do something about it!" That would be a logical response to his problem. But that kind of advice doesn't apply to every situation in life. In fact, in our text for today, Jesus teaches us that in some cases, the exact opposite response is what's called for. Here in our text, Jesus says, in effect, "Don't just do something. Instead, sit there." In fact, let's let that be our theme today:

"Don't just do something. Instead, sit there."

Today, we'll see how that theme plays out first,

I. In Martha's Actions.

And then, II. In Mary's Choice.

Our text begins with Jesus traveling toward Jerusalem on his way to celebrate the Feast of Dedication. When he comes to the village of Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem, a woman named Martha invites him into her home. Martha was a believer who is also the sister of Mary and Lazarus, whom Jesus would later raise from the dead. In fact, it was at Lazarus' funeral that

Martha confesses her faith in God's ability to raise Lazarus from the dead.

Now just for a minute, I want you to put yourself in Martha's sandals. You just invited Jesus, the very Son of God into your home for a meal. What's going through your mind? "Yikes! What have I done? And what do I still need to do?" You talk about pressure! Kind of like if your husband casually announces that he's invited his boss over for dinner and he'll be here in 15 minutes. Or you're meeting the parents of your future son-in-law for the first time and you desperately want to make a good impression. "Quick, clean the house! Check the fridge. Do we have anything to serve besides peanut butter and jelly?"

Don't you think Martha felt a little bit of that pressure? She wants to be a good host. She wants to serve Jesus' physical needs. She wants to show her love and appreciation for her Savior. Her motives were good. She wanted to serve her Lord. And she expected that others would want to do the same thing, including her sister. In fact she expected that Jesus would want Mary to do the same thing. And so, when Mary isn't helping Martha, what does Martha say to Jesus? "*Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all this work by myself? Tell her to help me!*" (Luke 10:40)

Again, can you relate? Have you ever felt like everyone else has found something else to do and left you to do all the work? You're taking responsibility. You're trying to do the right thing. And nobody's helping you. Nobody seems to care. And maybe you're not just looking at the people around you. Maybe you're looking up at God, thinking, "God, how could you let this happen? Don't you care about me? Don't you care that I have to do all this work by myself?"

Well, the fact is, God does care about you and me. He's not oblivious to what we're going through. He knows the responsibilities we have in life. He knows how often we want to do the right thing for the right reason. We want to use our time and talents in a way that serves God and our fellow man. But he also knows that too much emphasis on what we must do, and all that's not getting done, can have a negative impact on our attitude. Isn't that why Jesus says to Martha what he does? When Martha complained to him about Mary not helping, what does Jesus say to her? "*Martha, Martha,*" the Lord answered, "*you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed – or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.*" (Luke 10:41-42)

Boy, does Jesus pack a lot of meaning into those few words. Notice a number of things. Notice, that Jesus begins with this double proper noun, "Martha, Martha." Jesus is not speaking down to Martha. Rather, that's an expression of love and concern, just like when Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem with the words, "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.*" Here Jesus is expressing his love for Martha. Secondly, notice that Jesus doesn't condemn Martha for her acts of hospitality. He doesn't say that it was wrong in and of itself. Nor does he call into question her motives. He doesn't say, "You just want to look good, or be better than everyone else or show off your culinary skills." What he does do is to point out to her how all that emphasis on what she thinks she needs to do is impacting her psyche. It's bringing her down. What does Jesus say? "*Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things.*" By what kind of things? Well, Luke tells us that *Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.* She was distracted. Literally, she was being pulled in different directions. She was being dragged around by those things. She felt like she was being controlled by her to-do list. And it was stressing her out.

Again, can you relate? Have you ever felt like you were trying to keep too many balls in the air? Or maybe I should say, too many plates in the air? Have you ever seen those guys at the

circus who put plates up on long sticks and try to keep them spinning in the air? Do you ever feel like that's you, keeping all those plates in the air, trying to get all your work done, all the goals accomplished, without having them come crashing to the ground? Is it any wonder that you and I find ourselves worried and upset about many things, just like Martha?

Fortunately for Martha, and for you and me as well, Jesus offers a solution for the stress that comes from focusing on all the things we must do. But notice, Jesus doesn't talk in terms of right and wrong. Remember, he didn't condemn Martha for preparing a meal. Instead, Jesus speaks in terms of good and better. Both Mary and Martha had a choice to make concerning how they would spend their time. And in the words of Jesus, "*Mary has chosen what is better.*" And that leads us to shift our attention away from: I. Martha's Actions and instead focus on: II. Mary's Choice.

The question is, exactly what did Mary choose that was better? What was Jesus commending Mary for? Was Jesus commending Mary for finding a way out of doing the dishes? Is he holding up laziness as a virtue? Would Jesus prefer that people sit on the couch rather than work in the kitchen? The next time your parents ask you to set the table are you going to say, "Actually, we learned from Pastor Raasch that it would be better if we just sit here. We don't need to help." No, that's not what Jesus said. No, what was it that Mary did that was better? Luke tells us, *Mary...sat at Jesus' feet listening to what he said.* In other words, even though Mary maybe could have helped serve Jesus a physical meal, she recognized that it was far more important to let Jesus serve her a spiritual meal. Or to put it another way, while Martha thought that she was the only one doing the serving that day, the fact is, Mary recognized that on that day, Jesus was the one doing the serving. With his words, with his promises, Jesus was feeding Mary's faith. He was assuring her of his love, his forgiveness, his purpose for his life and hers. And at that moment, Mary recognized that nothing was more important than sitting and listening to the words of Jesus. Which is why, Jesus says, "*Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.*"

But now, let me ask you, what do you think Jesus means by the statement, "it will not be taken away from her?" Do you think he's saying, in effect, "Martha, you can't have her. I'm not going to let you drag your sister back into the kitchen. Nobody's going to cut short this quiet time that Mary is having with me"? Maybe. But I think Jesus mean far more than that. When Jesus says that Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her, isn't he referring to the fact that the gifts which he gives through his word are not temporary? Rather, they last forever! And the love and mercy that God has shown us in Christ extend into eternity. And the peace that Jesus works in our hearts, the assurance that we're all right in his eyes, the confidence that he's at our side—well, those are things that all the trouble in the world cannot take away from us. That's what Jesus was promising would be true for Mary, and for all those who choose to sit at Jesus' feet listening to what he has to say. It's what Jesus means when he says, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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.*" (Matthew 11:28-29) That's what Martha really needed on that hectic day. And it's what Mary found, in the words of her savior.

So, what do you think? Does this account of Mary and Martha have any application for our lives in the year of our Lord 2022? Did you have any trouble plugging yourself into this story? Yeah, me neither. But there's one more application I see her. This account reminds me that there are a lot of things that Satan can use to separate us from God and his word. Sometimes Satan uses bad things like pornography or alcohol or bitterness to separate us from God. But

there are just as many times when Satan uses good things like our job or our family or our desire to get a good night's sleep or enjoy some recreation or volunteer in our church or in our community. And Satan can use those good things—including even our desire to serve God—to distract or pull us away from the most important thing, what Jesus calls the one thing that is needed, and that's letting God speak to us through his holy Word.

In fact, I believe that applies to even something like going to church. I get the sense that for a lot of people these days, going to church, and for that matter, having devotions, reading the Bible, are things that they feel they should do. It's something that God expects them to do. Yes, maybe on occasion, it's something they want to do, but for the most part, it's something they feel they're supposed to do. You know, kind of like Martha serving Jesus because it's what she thought she should do.

But if you think about it, worship, in its very essence, is not about what we're doing for God. It's about what God is doing for us. In a worship service, the #1 Server is God. In his Word, God comes to us, he speaks to our hearts, he assures us of his love and reminds us of everything he's done for us in Christ. And in his Holy Supper he serves us with a covenant of Jesus' body and blood, given and shed for us, for the full and free forgiveness of our sins.

My friends, the next time you feel overwhelmed by all the things you should be doing, all the things that you want to do, all the ways that you could be serving others, think first about how much Jesus wants to serve you first. Let him do that, won't you? Quench the urge to just do something. And instead, just sit there—with your Bible, or with a devotion, or here in worship. And let Jesus do the serving. Let him fill you up, and smother you with his love, and recreate you in his image. And then, after he's done his work for you and in you, then you can go back to your work in whatever calling you have in life, with a new attitude, ready to serve others, because Jesus served you first. In his name. Amen.