

*One Thing is Necessary*  
Luke 10:38-42

**Luke's Gospel**

As I studied the passage we will be looking at this morning, my mind quickly went to the many messages I have heard or read over the years about Jesus' visit to Mary and Martha and the difference between the two women. Usually Martha's hospitality ends up being condemned and Mary's devotion to Jesus is exalted, and while there is a sense in which that is a major theme in this text, there are also needs to be great care to make sure what is taught matches what Jesus actually said. Jesus never contradicts the rest of Scripture, so what He says must be understood in light of what the word of God teaches concerning hospitality. It also must fit within the context. In other words, why does Luke include this particular story and why does he include it precisely at this point in his narrative?

Luke explains in the opening paragraph of his book the how and why of his gospel account. Luke made careful investigation of what happened as told by eye witnesses of the various events and then compiled his account in consecutive order so that Theophilus would know the exact truth about the things he had been taught about the life of Jesus (1:2-4). Luke's account is extensive, but it is not exhaustive, for even the apostle John stated at the end of his gospel account "*And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I supposed that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.*" Luke is selective in what he includes, so it is always important to understand the flow of what he writes in order to understand the reason for including a particular story. So let us quickly look at the context for this passage.

**Context**

Luke 9 concludes with several quick reports about people who said they wanted to follow Jesus, but who also found reasons to delay their claimed commitment. Luke 10 is set as a contrast to these people. It jumps past all that occurred during the Feast of Tabernacles recorded in John 7 and 8 and opens with Jesus' instructions to a group of disciples that were ready, able and willing to be sent out immediately. It continues with their report to Jesus when they return being joyful that even the demons were subject to them. Jesus immediately cautioned them not to become proud about the power He gave to them to carry out their ministries, but to instead rejoice that their names were recorded in heaven (10:1-20). Receiving God's grace in salvation is much more important than the ability to do supernatural things. Jesus then went on to express before these disciples His own great joy that the Father, Lord of heaven and earth, had revealed the gospel to these "babes," mere common people, while hiding these great truths from the wise and intelligent. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. The Father is revealed by the Son to whomever the Son desires, and they were blessed to have seen what the prophets and kings of old had desired to see and hear and had not (10:21-25). This is immediately followed by a story that demonstrated why the gospel was hidden from the wise and intelligent.

A lawyer wanted to test Jesus by asking how he might inherit eternal life. The man understood that the Law required that he love the Lord God with all his heart, soul, strength and mind, and that he love his neighbor as himself, but desiring to justify himself by limiting the requirements of the law, he asked Jesus, "*who is my neighbor.*" Jesus then told the story of the Good Samaritan which exposed the lawyer's inability to keep the law. The gospel was hidden from him because he continued to try to keep the law to inherit salvation instead of responding to its condemnation by seeking mercy from God.

This is the context for passage for study this morning. Follow along as I read Luke 10:38–42, <sup>38</sup> *Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home.* <sup>39</sup> *She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word.* <sup>40</sup> *But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me."* <sup>41</sup> *But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; <sup>42</sup> but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."*

There are several applications that can be made from this narrative which we will look at today, but the context here is a follow up to the story about the lawyer. Luke ends that story with Jesus telling him to go and do the same as the Samaritan who had shown mercy and demonstrated what it means to love your neighbor. Luke does not tell us the lawyer's reaction from which we assume he did not ask further questions of Jesus to find out how to gain eternal life since it cannot be earned by keeping the law. If you are not careful, it could seem like Jesus is commending the law as a means to inherit eternal life instead of leaving the gospel hidden from this lawyer. The story of Mary and Martha removes the idea that you can earn God's favor with good works. As we shall see, Martha was trying to do something commanded in the law, but Mary demonstrated a better understanding of what God actually desires.

I want to look at three aspects of this story along with some practical applications that arise from them. First, the diversity between the sisters. Second, the distraction the cares of the world were to Martha. Third, the devotion demonstrated by Mary. But before we look at those I want to look at the setting indicated by verses 38

### **The Setting - Luke 10:38**

Though Luke does not mention the Feast of Tabernacles, which occurs in Autumn, we know from John 7 & 8 that Jesus was in Jerusalem during that time and taught in the temple on several occasions prompting the increased conflict between Him and the religious leaders. Luke does not indicate where Jesus is when He sends out the seventy disciples or where He was when they returned or had the encounter with the lawyer. Luke's comment here is that *"they were traveling along"* indicating Jesus was going from one place to another with others accompanying Him, most likely the twelve since they are often found traveling with Jesus and the seventy is a very large group and there is no reference to Him traveling with such a large group either before or after this incident.

We know from other passages that Jesus and the twelve went back up to Galilee before heading back to Jerusalem in the Spring for Passover, but it was not important for Luke to identify where He was at this point. While Theophilus would probably know the location of major cities and regions, it is unlikely he would know the location of the many villages throughout Judea, Samaria and Galilee. It was enough for him to know that it was in some village along the way as Jesus traveled. We know from John 11 that Martha along with her sister, Mary, and their brother, Lazarus, all lived in the village of Bethany. Bethany is about two miles southeast of Jerusalem nearby the main road between Jerusalem and Jericho. The Mount of Olives sits between Bethany and Jerusalem and it takes about an hour to walk from there to the Temple. We are not told if Martha, Mary and Lazarus all live in the same house or if they just live in the same village. It is clear that they have close relationships with each other.

We also note that it is Martha that welcomes Jesus into her home which is a somewhat unusual designation. And while speculative, this gives us some possible insight into Martha's situation and her actions. It would have been extremely unusual for a single woman to have her own home at that time. A single unmarried woman would normally live with her parents or other relative, so if that was the case, the home would be identified as such. If it was her parents' home and they had died, since inheritance in that culture went to the son, it would be identified as Lazarus' home. If she were married, it would be identified as her husband's home. This then indicates the possibility that Martha was a widow living in

the home left to her by her husband. In addition, having the ability to show hospitality to Jesus and His disciples indicates that she had sufficient wealth, but not enough to hire servants.

### **Diversity**

The first thing I want to note from this story is the diversity between Martha and Mary. They are sisters, but they are different from each other. From this passage and John 11 & 12, it appears that Martha is more task oriented while Mary is more people oriented and more outwardly emotional. Martha is busy serving her guests both here and in John 12. Mary is sitting and Jesus' feet listening here, and in John 12 she anoints the feet of Jesus with a pound of very costly perfume and wiped them with her hair. In John 11 when Jesus came to Bethany to console them at Lazarus' death, it is Martha that comes out to meet Him when she hears He has arrived while Mary stayed in the house. She only comes out when Martha returns to tell her privately that Jesus was calling for her. When Mary did leave the house, those with her followed supposing she was going to the tomb to weep there. When she came to Jesus, she fell at His feet weeping and saying, "*Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.*" Her weeping and the weeping of those with her deeply moved Jesus in His spirit and He also wept when He arrived at Lazarus' tomb.

It is important to point out that while it is apparent that Martha and Mary were different in temperament and orientation, Jesus loved both of them and Lazarus. While John 11:2 makes specific mention of Mary as the one that anointed Jesus with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair to identify her, John 11:5 specifically states, "*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*" You would be very hard pressed to make any kind of argument that Jesus favored one of the sisters over the other. Jesus loved both of them even though they were different from each other.

It is easy for us to forget that not only is God not a respecter of persons, but He made each individual to serve Him in his or her own unique way. You have no reason to think you are innately either superior or inferior to other people when it comes to either your relationship with God or ability to serve Him. Whether you identify more with Martha or more with Mary in this story, you are needed and God can and will use you if you will follow Him.

As I have pointed out many times from 1 Corinthians 12, God uniquely equips those that belong to Him with a spiritual gift or gifts to serve Him in a ministry or ministries that He gives them according to His empowerment with each person in the body of Christ contributing to the building up of the whole for the glory of God. Every gift, every ministry and every empowerment is needed or the body will be handicapped and unable to live up to its full potential. The body of Christ needs both those like Mary and those like Martha and those like you. The church needs and God is glorified by those who are task oriented and by those who are people oriented. It needs both those who are stoic in personality and those who are emotional.

The difficulty is keeping it balanced and continuing to mature in all areas. It is an error to look at your temperament, areas of strength and weaknesses, orientation, or spiritual giftedness and then restrict yourself to do what you like, what you are comfortable with or can already do well while avoiding what you do not like, what makes you uncomfortable or you do not do so well. The goal of the Christian life is to glorify God by becoming like the Lord Jesus Christ. That will require you to mature in all areas including those that are unnatural or difficult for you. Take advantage of the ability of others and learn from them to function in the areas that are difficult or seem unnatural to you, and help others with your areas of strength. You do not have to become like other people, but you are to become more like Jesus.

### **Distractions**

Jesus rebukes Martha, but it is not because she was serving or that she was task oriented. It was because she was out of balance and had become distracted by what she was doing. Notice that verse 40 is specific in stating that "*Martha was distracted with all her preparations,*" or as the NKJV puts it,

*“Martha was distracted with much serving.”* The word here, **periespa:tw** / **periespato**, is a compound word meaning “to be drawn off from around.” It is used figuratively to describe someone that has become overburdened, worried or anxious about what they are doing that they are drawn away from the purpose of what they are doing. In this case, Martha had become so overburdened by her serving that she forgot the purpose of what she was doing.

Hospitality was important in the ancient world and it is still important today according to the New Testament, though the formality has generally diminished in the last generation. Let me give you a few examples.

The first example is in Genesis 14 when Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine to Abraham and blessed him on his return from defeating Chedorlaomer and his allied kings. Those who were righteous were expected to show hospitality. Another example of this by an early patriarch was Job who defended his righteousness claiming, *“The alien has not lodged outside, for I have opened my doors for the traveler”* (Job 31:32)

In Genesis 18 three men come to Abraham while he is camped by the oaks of Mamre. The text reveals that one of these persons was the LORD, but Abraham did not know that at the time. Abraham responds quickly when the men arrive asking them to stay and be refreshed in the shade of the tree while bringing them water so their feet could be washed. Abraham then quickly had Sarah prepare bread, a calf, and curds and milk for them. He then stood by the tree while they ate.

In Genesis 19 when the two angels who appeared as men came to the gate of Sodom, Lot insisted that they come to his home where he would feed and care for them for the night even though they had planned on staying in the town square. Their protection was one of his primary endeavors because hospitality was important.

In Genesis 24 Rebekah distinguished herself by showing kindness to Abraham’s servant in watering his camels even before he identified himself and his mission. Her brother, Laban, continued that hospitality by only providing water to wash, food to eat and a place to stay, but he also took care of the camels.

The Mosaic law gives significant guidance for being hospitable ranging from general commands such as to not wrong a stranger for they were strangers in the land of Egypt (Exodus 22:21), to inviting strangers and those from out of town to join in their festivals (Deuteronomy 16:11). They were commanded to *“show love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt”* (Deuteronomy 10:19).

A failure to show hospitality was a serious offence. Part of the reason for God’s judgment of the Ammonites and Moabites was because they did not provide food and water to the Israelites when they came out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 23:3-4). God struck Nabal down because of his lack of hospitality toward David and his men (1 Samuel 25). Gideon came back and punished the cities of Succoth and Peniel because they refused to show hospitality to him and his men in their pursuit of the Midianite kings they had defeated.

It was a blessing to provide hospitality for God’s servants. This is seen in the example of Zarephath who provided for Elijah her last measure of meal (1 Kings 17), and the example of the Shunemite who provided for Elisha (2 Kings 4).

The New Testament has even more detailed commands based in these Old Testament practices. Romans 12:13 and 1 Peter 4:9 give general commands to be hospitable with Hebrews 13:2 adding that you may even entertain angels in doing so. 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8 both make practicing hospitality a requirement for those who would be elders. 1 Timothy 5:10 includes hospitality as a character trait of those who would be qualified to be supported by the church as widows indeed.

With that as a background, it is easy to see that Martha took very seriously her responsibility to show hospitality to Jesus, a traveling servant of God. The problem was not that Martha was serving or even that she was working so hard to do it well. The problem was that she let it draw her away from its very purpose.

The focus of hospitality is the good of the guest. You strive to provide an environment and services that are pleasing and make the guest feel welcome. For all of Martha's hard work to do this by her serving, she in fact does the opposite by going to Jesus and complaining to Him - *"Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me."* Her familiarity in approaching Jesus in the manner indicates that He had probably been a guest in her home before, perhaps many times. However, she is accusing the Lord and treating Him like He is the head butler in charge of directing the servants. To be fair, it is more likely that she recognizes that Jesus is the leader of the group of men traveling with Him and in her exasperation she is seeking His assistance in getting some additional help to serve all of His companions, but even with that, it was still rude, and what would Jesus have to do with giving instructions to her sister? Martha had lost sight of whom and why she was serving.

Jesus' rebuke of her confirms the problem. *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."* Martha was worried / anxious (merimnavw / merimnaō) about her many serving tasks, and it resulted in her being bothered, (qorubavzw / thorubadzō), troubled, emotionally upset. Jesus did not rebuke her for her serving, He rebuked her for letting it become the focus of her attention to the point she became anxious and emotionally troubled by it.

It is easy to pick on Martha for this and even criticize her for her serving, but that would miss the point. If she had kept her focus and not lost the purpose of her hospitality, it would have been the blessing that she had intended. The problem was the loss of the purpose of her ministry, not her ministry itself.

It has been my observation over the years that this is a fairly common problem among God's people. The focus becomes so narrow on some particular ministry or aspect of it that its actual purpose in fitting in with the bigger picture is lost. The result is anxiety, emotional turmoil, complaining, sharp words, and even quitting and leaving problems for others to try and solve, often with little or no notice. I have seen it happen in every kind of ministry I can think of - working in the nursery, with children, teens and adults, cleaning, making repairs, construction projects, office work, music, ministries of mercy, helping others, providing meals, organizing and running fellowships or conferences, missions, evangelism, counseling, teaching and even preaching. You name it, and the danger of being like Martha is there and is proven by how quickly we can complain in our prayers to the Lord that He has not provided the help needed for us to fulfill the ministry we are endeavoring to accomplish for His glory.

Paul's instructions in Philippians 2:13-15 are appropriate to apply in battling this in our lives - *"... it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world..."* We must keep our focus on the actual purpose of any ministry. Jesus' commendation of Mary helps us understand that.

## **Devotion**

Jesus rebuked Martha for allowing herself to become worried and troubled by the many things she was doing in her serving. He commended Mary because she had a proper focus on what was important. Mary had been sitting at Jesus' feet listening to His word (vs. 39). Martha wanted Jesus to tell her to get up and help her with the serving. Jesus said, *"only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."* He would not tell Mary to get up and help Martha, for Mary had chosen to do something more important at that time. She was listening to the word of God, and that opportunity would quickly pass. She could help with the food and clean up later. As stated in Deuteronomy 8:3 and quoted by Jesus, *Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.* The feeding of the soul was more important than the feeding

of the body for it is only when we know the Lord through His word that we understand the purpose of life and how to live it. Without that, life is reduced to the vanity spoken of in Ecclesiastes in which whatever is gained or experienced in this life is ultimately a futile chasing of the wind without purpose or meaning. Only in knowing God and living for His glory is there eternal purpose to life, and every aspect of life then takes on meaning as it moves us toward that goal, and that begins by knowing the word of God which reveals Him and His will to us.

It is easy for life to lose its proper focus and be caught up in the rat race of those around us. Jesus' commendation of Mary reminds us of what is actually important. Be careful that your priority is to be rich toward God instead of the things and pleasures of this world. The ramification of that is that the feeding of your soul must come before the things of this world. Does your devotional life reflect that priority? Are you finding ways to hear, read and study God's word? Have you learned to pray anytime and anywhere and are you quick to do so? Have you figured out how God has gifted you and found ways to serve Him accordingly? Are you making the most of your time in order to fulfill the eternal purposes for which God created and saved you? If not, then you need to make some changes in how you are living your life, and that needs to be done sooner than later, starting today, not tomorrow.

Be careful as well that any ministry you do is focused on the glory of God and not your own pleasures or glory. I sign my correspondence, *Simply a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ*, as a reminder to myself that all that I do must be for the glory of my master. It is irrelevant what people think of me or even know my name. The name of Jesus is what is important. I rest in the comfort of knowing that anything God wants me to do He will equip me to accomplish or supply those who are able to help me carry out that ministry. God's work must be done His way as He desires and not my way as I desire. The greater your focus is on doing ministry for God's glory, the less danger of repeating Martha's failure. You will be able to rejoice in serving the Lord in any circumstance without complaint. You will even rejoice that what you are doing is used by the Lord in His grand plan of helping others know and walk with Him - and that includes every kind of support ministry of service such as cleaning, working in the nursery and hospitality.

*“. . . whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen - 1 Peter 4:11*

**Sermon Notes - 12/11/2016**  
**ONE THING IS NECESSARY - Luke 10:38-42**

**Luke's Gospel**

The story of Martha and Mary must fit within the context of Luke's \_\_\_\_\_ narrative

**Context**

Luke records Jesus' admonition of the seventy to rejoice more about being \_\_\_\_\_ than power in ministry  
Jesus rejoiced that the Father revealed the gospel to the humble while \_\_\_\_\_ it from the wise / intelligent  
The story of the lawyer is an example of the gospel being \_\_\_\_\_ from the wise / intelligent  
The gospel is hidden from those seeking to \_\_\_\_\_ their salvation instead of repenting & seeking God's mercy  
Luke ends the story of the Good Samaritan telling the lawyer to go and do the same - but \_\_\_\_\_ do not save

**The Setting - Luke 10:38**

Luke does not indicate the \_\_\_\_\_ because that was not important to his point - or to Theophilus  
Jesus and the twelve eventually arrive back in \_\_\_\_\_ before heading back to Jerusalem in the Spring  
From John 11 we learn that Martha, Mary & Lazarus live in \_\_\_\_\_ - two miles southwest of Jerusalem  
Martha welcomes Jesus into \_\_\_\_\_ - an unusual designation - perhaps she was a widow

**Diversity**

Martha is more \_\_\_\_\_ oriented and Mary is more people oriented and outwardly emotional  
Martha and Mary are very different from each other, but Jesus loves \_\_\_\_\_ of them and their brother (Jn. 11:5)  
God not a respecter of persons, and He made each individual to serve Him in his or her own \_\_\_\_\_ way  
1 Corinthians 12 - your gifts, ministries and empowerment all come from \_\_\_\_\_ for the common good  
The goal of the Christian life is to become like \_\_\_\_\_ - gifts, ministries and empowerment help all to mature

**Distractions**

Martha was distracted - *periespa:tw* / *periespato*, a word meaning "to be \_\_\_\_\_ from around."

She became so overburdened by her serving that she forgot the \_\_\_\_\_ of what she was doing

\_\_\_\_\_ was important in the ancient world: Genesis 14 - Melchizedek. Job 31:32

Genesis 18 - \_\_\_\_\_ hosts the Lord and two angels

Genesis 19 - \_\_\_\_\_ hosts the two angels and seeks to protect them

Genesis 24 - \_\_\_\_\_ distinguishes herself by her hospitality to Abraham's servant, and Lot hosts him

The Mosaic law gives instructions on \_\_\_\_\_ - Exodus 22:21, Deuteronomy 16:11

A \_\_\_\_\_ to show hospitality was a serious offense - Deuteronomy 23:3-4; 1 Samuel 25

It was a blessing to show showing hospitality to God's \_\_\_\_\_: 1 Kings 17, 2 Kings 4

The New Testament \_\_\_\_\_ hospitality: Rom. 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9; Heb. 13:2; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:10; Titus 1:8

Martha took very seriously her \_\_\_\_\_ to show hospitality

The focus of hospitality is the good of the guest, yet Martha was \_\_\_\_\_ accusing and complaining to Jesus

Martha was worried / anxious and became bothered / \_\_\_\_\_ / emotionally upset by all her serving tasks  
Jesus does not rebuke her for \_\_\_\_\_, but for letting it become the source of anxiety and emotional turmoil  
The problem was the loss of the \_\_\_\_\_ of her ministry, not her ministry itself  
The danger of being like Martha is proven by prayers of \_\_\_\_\_ that the Lord is not providing enough  
Philippians 2:13-15. To avoid complaining, the focus must remain on the actual \_\_\_\_\_ of ministry

## Devotion

Mary was commended because she had a proper focus and \_\_\_\_\_ - hearing the Lord speak  
Deuteronomy 8:3 - the feeding of the \_\_\_\_\_ is more important than the feeding of the body  
Without a proper understanding of life's purpose, life is reduced to the \_\_\_\_\_ explained in Ecclesiastes  
Be careful that your priority is to be rich toward \_\_\_\_\_ instead of the things and pleasures of this world  
Make the most of your \_\_\_\_\_ in order to fulfill the eternal purposes for which God created and saved you  
Any ministry you do must be focused on the glory of \_\_\_\_\_ and not your own pleasures or glory  
The greater your \_\_\_\_\_ is on doing ministry for God's glory, the less danger of repeating Martha's failure  
1 Peter 4:11 - serve . . . so that in all things God may be \_\_\_\_\_ through Jesus Christ . . .

## KIDS KORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. **Young Children** - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. **Older Children** - Do one or more of the following: 1) Count how many times the word "serve" is said. 2) Discuss with your parents how to keep a proper focus on the purpose of what you do.

## THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. Why does Luke include the story in Luke 10:38-42 in his gospel narrative and at this point in it? What is the flow of the context of this story in Luke 10? What is the name and location of the village in which Martha and Mary lived? Why doesn't Luke include that detail? Why is it unusual that the home is designated as Martha's home? What might this indicate? What differences can you note between Martha and Mary? Does Jesus love one of the sisters more than the other? Why or why not? What does 1 Corinthians 12 teach about the origin and importance of your spiritual gift, your ministry and its empowerment? How do you see yourself fitting in the body of Christ? What does it mean that Martha was distracted (Luke 10:40)? What was causing that distraction? What was the importance of hospitality in the ancient world? Give examples. What does the Mosaic law command concerning hosting others? What does the New Testament command concerning hospitality? What is the purpose of hospitality? What did Martha do that shows she forgot that purpose? What does Jesus' rebuke of her reveal about her failure? How have you seen yourself or others lose focus of the purpose of ministry? What proves that you or others have fallen into the same error as Martha? How do the instructions in Philippians 2:13-15 help you prevent that kind of failure? Why did Jesus commend Mary - what was she doing? Why is the feeding of the soul more important than the feeding of the body? Explain. What danger do you face in being caught up in the "rat race." What can help you keep the priority of becoming rich toward God? Does your devotional life reflect its proper priority? If you are not keeping the proper priorities at present, what must you do to change that? What is the danger of not changing it? What are some of the things that will indicate when you have lost focus of the proper priorities of ministry? How can you make sure your ministries keep their proper focus?