

## A Tale of Two Sisters

### Luke 10:38-42

In the late 1980's Stephen Covey emerged as one of the leading proponents of time management with his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. It was then followed by another best seller that urged people to put *First Things First*. Rather than working harder, smarter, and faster with the ever increasing demands on time and life in which we focus on time and things, his emphasis on relationships and results are what creates effectiveness.

This approach looks at establishing priorities that become the focus of activity, helping to discern what is good versus what is best.

In his book he writes "Putting first things first is an issue at the very heart of life. Almost all of us feel torn by the things we want to do, by the demands placed on us, by the many responsibilities we have. We all feel challenged by the day-to-day and moment-by-moment decisions we must make regarding the best use of our time."

The student feels the pressure of competing time demands trying to balance school assignments from various classes along with any extracurricular activities he or she may be involved in.

The newly married couple understands the pressure as they battle fitting in activities for two people now instead of one. The coordination of shopping, work, meals, meetings, getting together with friends, work outs at the gym, travel for work that requires being away from home. Add a child or two along with housework and homework if you're taking on night school and life instantaneously becomes pandemonium.

We assume that things will get easier and life will slow down when the kids are older and they are able to take care of themselves by picking up their own

room or getting themselves dressed, but you add recitals and little league and after school jobs.

When they finally move out on their own, they still need you to help them shop for a car or hunt for an apartment or fix a leaky sink.

Many of you who are retired have said how much busier you are now than when you were working.

Here is a picture of a clock. We have one on the back wall but I don't pay much attention to it. We have them scattered around the house. You may wear one or carry it with you in your purse. Your cell phone has one that we look at multiple times a day. Most vehicles have one installed. It governs our life. It tells the time measuring hours and minutes and seconds. Each day has the same amount. We start off the day by incrementally carving out sections of time and allot them to activities. Some people schedule it down to the minute. We know how long it takes to get to work barring no unforeseen things like bad weather or accidents.

If we meet with friends for lunch we know we have to leave by a certain time to make it to another appointment.

You get my point.

Here is a picture of an ordinary compass. While you can use a compass for a number of things, its primary purpose is to help navigate to a certain location in any given area.

Turn to our passage in **Luke 10** this morning where we will consider the tale of two sisters. We read about them in verses **38-42**.

One is guided by the clock.

The other is guided by the compass.

One is engulfed in work.

The other is engulfed in worship.

Work and worship are both important activities in the life of a Christian that need to be in balance. I

want to suggest to you this morning something of significance for the believer. It's not very profound, but I think it's important - *when our worship is out of balance, our work will also be out of balance*. I think the story of Martha and Mary bear that out.

Too many people, Christians included, look at the weekend as the end of the week. We view the weekend as the time we can catch up on everything we didn't get done during the week – shopping, yard work, laundry, cleaning. We cram so much into those two days that we have little or no time to worship. Folks, that's backwards. If we don't take time to worship, and I'm not just talking about Sunday services, if we don't take time to worship through the week, then our work and our attitude about the work we are doing will suffer. Sunday is the beginning of the week and time in worship should propel us into the work we will be engaged in during the coming week. Our worship, or lack thereof sets the tone for our work – and by that I mean anything we are doing, not just a 9-5 job.

I have two main points this morning.

The heart of the matter – vs. 38-40

The heart of the master – vs. 41-42

## I. THE HEART OF THE MATTER – v. 38-40

Notice first of all in **verse 38** a friendly heart.

### A. A Friendly Heart – v. 38

Luke states that Jesus and His disciples, going on their way, came to a certain village where they were received into a home belonging to Martha who had a sister named Mary. Luke does not give us the name of the village but when we search elsewhere in Scripture (**John 12:1-2**) we find that these two sisters lived in the village of Bethany, which was located about 2 miles from Jerusalem.

Some scholars believe that this is the first time Jesus meets these women, who also have a brother

who may have been away at the time as he is not mentioned here. These scholars conclude that this may be the first encounter because of the way Luke introduces them: **“He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. She had a sister called Mary.”**

Some also suggest that Martha was a widow and the oldest because she is named first and because the home is described as her home.

It is in this verse that we see that Martha has a friendly heart. Again, we don't know how Jesus came into contact with Martha, but somehow a connection was made. On other occasions we see that Jesus sent disciples ahead to make preparations for lodging and that may be the case here.

However it came about we see that she opened her home to Jesus and we assume His disciples as well. The KJV says she received them. It's a word that means to receive under one's roof. We know from both Old and New Testament studies that in those cultures to receive someone in one's home meant they came under your protection and provision. The same Greek word is used when Zacchaeus climbed down from his perched position in the Sycamore tree to welcome Jesus into his home.

When Paul and Silas were accused by a mob in Thessalonica the word is used of being welcomed into the house of Jason.

**James 2:25** uses the word to remind us of the care Rahab gave to the spies.

One thing is for sure about Martha and that is she had a heart to be a hostess. We imagine her home to be spic and span, no messy rooms, no neglected household, no lack of provisions of any kind, fussing about every detail.

Martha had a servant's heart, but as we will see even a servant's heart can be easily altered.

Jesus was welcomed into the home of Martha as a guest. In that respect she had a friendly heart. Notice next a focused heart.

## B. A Focused Heart – v. 39

In this verse we meet the other sister, the younger sister – Mary. We find her sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to His teaching. It is interesting that on the three occasions where we find Mary, she is at the feet of Jesus. Besides here where we find her focused on the words of Jesus, we see her in **John 11:32** at the feet of Jesus expressing her grief over the loss of her brother Lazarus. Then we see her in **John 12:3** at Jesus' feet pouring oil on them as He dined in their home the week before His crucifixion.

It was a posture of submission recognizing Jesus' authority over her, recognizing that she needed to hear what He had to say, recognizing that a follower is someone who listens and then obeys. The word listen or heard suggests an understanding of what is said. It carries the idea of listening with the intent of obedience. The tense of the sentence suggests that listening was a continuous activity. She didn't come in sit down, get up and do some other tasks, then return and sit down, listen and so on. She sat down and stayed there to listen.

It is used in **Luke 8:21** when Jesus is told that His family was waiting for Him. He said those who hear God's Word and practice it are His family.

James uses it to speak of those who listen and do the Word of God. **(1:22)**

In writing to the Thessalonians, Paul commends them for hearing the Word of God and accepting it. **(2:13)**

Now, I want to suggest to you that both are doing something that is commendable, even necessary. Martha is serving. Mary is sitting. Martha is working. Mary is worshipping. Both are important.

Remember what I said a moment ago. Work and worship are both important activities in the life of a Christian that need to be in balance. When our worship is out of balance our work will suffer. I think we see that in this passage., but I believe worship has the greater importance because it affects every other part of our life.

Before we move on, I want to ask which person best represents you. **Are you a Martha or a Mary? Are you the one who is always out in the kitchen doing? Are you the one who is always in the living room sitting?**

**Do you take time to just sit and get refreshed at the feet of Jesus? Or are you so busy that you don't feel you can take the time to stop, because if you do, you feel you will get further behind?**

I love my twin brother, but I think he's a Martha. He has to be busy doing something. We went to his home for Thanksgiving. Dinner was done and we were all sitting around talking, enjoying time together as a family, everyone that is except my brother. He was in the kitchen doing the dishes, picking the meat off the turkey, scrubbing the pan that boiled the potatoes. He does the same thing when we go to Dad's. He's in the kitchen while the rest of us are sitting around listening to Dad.

I think you get my point. **Do you take time to sit and listen at the feet of Jesus?**

In 1954 Intersity released a little booklet titled *My Heart Christ's Home*. If you are unfamiliar with the booklet it is a story about a person who invites Christ to come in and live with him. He has made each of the rooms available to Christ to make Him welcome. The various rooms and their functions are described. One of those rooms is the living room. It has overstuffed chairs and a sofa. There is a fireplace that provides a warm ambiance that makes the room comfortable and inviting.

As he showed Jesus the room, He seemed pleased. Jesus suggested that they meet there often to talk and have fellowship together. The new Christian was thrilled as he couldn't think of any other person he would rather spend time with. Jesus promised that He would be there every morning to meet him at the start of the day.

Every morning they met in the living room where Jesus would take a book of the Bible from the bookcase, open it and read together. From it Jesus taught wonderful truths of what He had done. It made the man's heart sing for joy.

Eventually, over time the pressures of responsibility began to erode the time they spent together. It wasn't deliberate. Their time each day grew shorter and then a day would be missed here and there, sometimes several days in row. Urgent matters, demanding matters squeezed out the time they used to spend eagerly together.

As the story goes, the man rushed down the stairs and past the doorway leading into the living room where he noticed Jesus sitting by Himself in front of a fire. It dawned on the man right then that he had invited Jesus into his heart as a guest to live with Him, but he was neglecting Him.

Embarrassed, he hesitantly went in and apologized. He asked Jesus if He had been there every morning and Jesus said that He had promised every day to be there to meet together. He had been faithful in spite of the man's faithlessness and he asked forgiveness.

The story goes on to remind us that a quiet time at the feet of Jesus isn't just for our spiritual growth, it is also a time of great pleasure for Jesus who values our fellowship. It is a time where we not only are reminded of His great love and sacrifice for us, it is also a time where we express our love and adoration to Him.

Then it concludes by stating **“Don't let Christ wait alone in the living room of your heart, but every day**

**find a time and place when, with the Word of God and in prayer, you may be together with Him.”**

**Are you taking time to sit at Jesus' feet and listen?** Mary did. If we do, it will change our heart. If we don't, that took will change our heart. Mary had a focused heart.

There was a friendly heart.

There was a focused heart.

There was a frustrated heart.

### C. A Frustrated Heart – v. 40

Here's where I see that balance is required between work and worship.

I want you to see something that we often miss in this story about Mary. We think that all she has done since Jesus stepped in the door and sat down was sit and listen, that she didn't do a thing to help her sister. Notice what Martha says. **“Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?”** It's in the imperfect active tense meaning that she kept on leaving me.

Mary had been in the kitchen, got her work done and then went out to be with Jesus. In that culture it was considered incredibly rude to invite someone into the home and then neglect them.

Now let's go back to Martha. First of all we see that she was distracted by all the preparations. The Phillip's Translation suggests that it was elaborate preparations. To her credit she didn't have a local Meijer's store to get premade rolls or a roasted chicken ready to serve. She didn't have a microwave oven to heat food up rapidly. Fixing a meal was a big deal and all the preparations had distracted her. The word that Luke uses here is a word that means to be drawn around with anxiety. She was fussing about every little detail about the meal, wanting everything to be perfect for the most important guest she would ever entertain. She was

worried the potatoes wouldn't be cooked through. She was worried the meat would be too tough. She was worried the dishes might have spots on them.

Worried about getting everything on the table she finally came to Jesus and complained to Him about her sister's lack of help. It literally suggests that she came in and interrupted Jesus. Greek scholar A.T. Robertson says that both her actions and her words were explosive. She had had enough and wanted Jesus to do something about it. And in both what she said and how she said it was a rebuke of Jesus. She was frustrated that she was left to do all the work and couldn't spend any time with her guest.

Folks, here's something to remember that is very evident with Martha. Jesus will teach about it on another occasion. Eventually what is stored up in the heart comes out in our attitudes and actions. From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Maybe she had dropped some subtle hints, some small verbal or non-verbal cues, but Mary either didn't get them or she did and ignored them. Eventually the subtle hints became a little more obvious. There's the clearing of the throat signal. If they had cell phones, she would have sent a text. Then there is opening and closing the cupboard doors with some force. We might call it slamming. How about clanging pots and pans loudly? Finally, we see the not so subtle interruption and accusation. She exhibited outward anxiety, agitation, and anger.

Now I want you to understand this. Martha's problem wasn't that she had too much work. Her problem was that she allowed her work to distract her and pull apart. Along the way she had forgotten what was really important - spending time with Jesus.

She assumed that Jesus would side with her. Martha wanted Jesus to validate her work over the worship that Mary was enjoying. She thought Mary should have known better and excuse herself to

help. She thought Jesus should be sensitive and not talk so long or encourage Mary to help.

Charles Hummel in *Freedom From the Tyranny of the Urgent* writes: "Tension and frustration mount when we are performing the wrong tasks or trying to cram too many of the right activities into a given period...A critical spirit develops and we begin to judge and condemn others for what they do or don't do. Anytime you feel a wave of criticism gaining momentum in your spirit remember that it's completely out of line as far as God is concerned."

I think each of us has experienced that one degree or another – at home, at work, even at church. We're busy in the church doing something. We wish someone would help us. Someone gets a name. We become critical and complain to anyone who will listen or to someone we think will side with us.

Was what Martha doing wrong? No. Was the attitude she displayed in the work she was doing wrong? Yes. She felt that what she needed done was more important than what Jesus was doing. The moment we begin to complain about the work we are doing, that is the moment we lose the blessing in the work. That's why I want to suggest that worship is such a vital component of work, no matter what it is, and while we are doing it.

The Psalmist exhorts us to **"serve the Lord with gladness."** (Psalm 100:2) Interestingly, your NIV Bible reads **"worship the Lord with gladness"** suggesting that service and worship are synonymous.

In **Colossians 3:22-24**, Paul tells us that all our work needs to be as if we were doing it for the Lord. When we have such a perspective on work, by incorporating worship, then we will not see work as drudgery or become critical because we are doing it for the Lord.



In his book *A Living Hope*, Dr. John Barnett reminds us that we should **“worship the Lord Your God, and Him only shall you worship.”** He concludes that worship must come before service and I agree. That’s what Mary did. Dr. Barnett goes on to say that if our work ever gets **“dull, tedious and wearying that is a sign that the oil of worship is running low. Worship must always come before service.”**

If I were a betting man, I’d bet my bottom dollar that Martha started off with the right attitude, but at some point it went south, and in a hurry. She was forcing Jesus to insist her sister stop and help. I also want you to notice that she accused Jesus of not caring, which couldn’t be further from the truth because throughout Scripture we see how much He cares. She had already decided what His care should look like – Mary needed to help and He needed to tell Mary to help.

That is the heart of the matter. Let’s close with the heart of the Master.

## II. THE HEART OF THE MASTER – v. 41-42

### A. His Exhortation – v. 41

Jesus speaks directly to Martha and has a word about her and a word about Mary. First, it is a word of exhortation. Jesus tells her that she was worried about too many things that she didn’t need to be worried about. It’s the same word used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when He tells us not to be worried about this life, what we will eat or wear or even about tomorrow.

Matthew Henry writes **“Those who are entangled in this life are not easily disentangled.”**

Warren Wiersbe suggests that **“what we do with Christ is of greater importance than what we do for Christ...Few things are as damaging to the Christian life as trying to work for Christ without**

**taking time to commune with Christ...If serving Christ makes us difficult to live with, then something is terribly wrong with our service.”**

Later on in **John 12:1-2** we see Martha serving Christ again, this time without complaint. But here, Jesus exhorts her for a wrong attitude. Then He gives a word of encouragement about Mary but it was for Martha.

### B. His Encouragement – v. 42

Some scholars want to suggest that Jesus is saying to her that a simple meal would have been fine and she didn’t need to worry about fixing a feast. I think He is talking about spending time with Him as of greater value. She had allowed her gift of service to be spoiled by a wrong attitude.

Only one thing is really needed, spending time with Jesus and He wasn’t going to take that away from Mary. It encouraged Mary that her heart was right, but encouraged Martha to reprioritize what was important.

David essentially said the same thing in the Psalms. **Psalms 27:4 – “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.”**

Jesus did not say that what Martha was doing was unimportant. I think she truly had a heart to give her best, it was just done with a wrong attitude and Jesus exhorted her for it, but He did go on to say that what Mary was doing was better.

Jesus may be encouraging you today to put down your apron or hammer or shovel and sit with Him. But I also think He is saying that balance is necessary. **Someone wrote that “sitting without serving is powerless; serving without sitting is directionless, serving after sitting produces power**

and balance.”

I think Martha eventually got it. We see her at the tomb of Lazarus confessing to Jesus that He is **“the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”**

We can let time give us direction on what gets done and when only to be frustrated because we can't get it all done. In the end it only serves to shortchange any time we may hope to have with the Lord.

Or we can let our direction be set by the compass of God's Word making that as the priority of our life.

That's when we find balance in our worship and work. Worship leads to a right perspective on work.

When that occurs our work becomes a time of worship. As we have seen in the example of Martha, work not only develops character, more importantly, work reveals character. It shows others what's in our heart.

When it comes to both our worship and our work I want to leave you with three thoughts to ponder.

Both work and worship must be done with a willing heart. It should never be done out of duty or expediency, what's in it for me.

Both work and worship must be done with a worshipping heart. Maybe that sounds a bit redundant but by it I mean that both should be motivated by a heart that desires to do our best and please God through everything we do so that He gets the praise.

**Matthew 5:16 “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”**

Both work and worship must be done with a wanting heart. By that I mean it is something we desire, even look forward to doing.

Mary showed balance and Martha needed to be reminded of it. **Do you?** Sit with Christ for a while and listen, then get up to serve.