

August 3, 2025

Luke 10:38-42

While I was reading this Gospel lesson, this question came to my mind: Why did Luke include this in his Gospel? Think about all the things Jesus said and did, the Gospel writers had to choose not to include *some* things, why would the Holy Spirit move Luke to include this episode of Jesus' life? To be frank, it's rather mundane. No one dies. No one comes back to life. There's no heated theological debate with the Pharisees. There's no demons cast out. There's no death threats from the religious leaders. There's no angels or soldiers or sickness or anything particularly out of the ordinary. This true story is really, really mundane. Two sisters have a guest over, and one sister is annoyed at the other? When does that ever happen? All the time. But look closely, and you'll see something very, very important for you and me to understand, something that I'm convinced the American Church has completely forgotten, something that will challenge us and fill us with joy. It's Jesus' tough, but loving teaching to Mary, Martha, and all who claim to follow him: **Put Down Your Work and Sit at Jesus' Feet**. And we are going to look at this through the lens of **1. Martha** and **2. Mary**.

1. Martha. Martha was what we would call an "Alpha." She's a leader. She's a worker. A motherbee. Notice that Luke says *she* invited Jesus into *her* house. Martha and her sister Mary, were the sisters of a man named Lazarus, who was the man that Jesus rose from the dead days before he himself went up to Jerusalem to be crucified. They were followers of Jesus. They were also his close friends. So it makes sense that Jesus would stop by Bethany to visit his dear friends, and Martha wants to put on this beautiful, magnificent meal for the man who wasn't only her friend, but her Savior. There is no doubt- she *loved* Jesus. *So she worked*. She worked at getting her house, which was likely a very nice, big house, cleaned and spotless for the spotless Lamb of God. She held nothing back and put together a meal, and experience fit for a King, *the King!* She's brought out the best wine, the finest herbs to season the meat, maybe a fattened calf or a lamb or a goat, and she starts the fire to cook the meat perfectly for Jesus, and the bread has to be perfectly cooked and the sides, the fruits, the olives, the honey, the... where's Mary? While Martha is slaving away for Jesus, Mary is doing *nothing*. Ugh. Seriously? How rude! Does she not realize who is in their house? Does she not realize whose presence she is in? Doesn't Mary realize how important and deserving Jesus is of their best? Doesn't Jesus know how important he is? You can hear the frustration in Martha's voice: "*Lord! Tell her to help me!*" Woah. Wait a minute- now we're yelling at Jesus and giving him orders. How did Martha go from lovingly serving Jesus with all she had to bossing him around?

Martha is a Christian. She calls Jesus "Lord." But there's something she doesn't get. She's made a mistake that many Christians make. She has made the mistake of believing that Jesus needs her more than she needs him. She has been tricked into finding more joy, comfort, satisfaction, her worth, value, her confidence, from what she can do for Jesus, and not from what he can do for her. Therefore, she was all over the place, overwhelmed by all these things that Jesus *never* asked

for. She's bitter and angry at her sister who she sees as incompetent. And she doubts the goodness and kindness of Jesus when he doesn't do what she wants- "*Don't you care?*" This happens all the time. There's a lot of Marthas in our churches, and perhaps some Marthas here. I'll admit it, I'm a bit of a Martha. I like to be busy. I like to grind. I like to do a lot of "pastor work." I also like seeing the results of my labor- in front of me. Immediately. And when my work doesn't immediately result in more people in Church, more people in Bible Study, more people in Campus Ministry, I get bitter and angry with people that I perceive are stopping me from getting the results I should be getting- all for Jesus, of course! And I get bitter at God- "*Don't you care? Don't you know how important this is, how important you are?*" It happens with church leaders, church council members, people who work in the Church, and work and work and work. They are doing all these things, sometimes too much because they feel like no one else will do them, even if they are asked. They get angry, short-tempered with those who aren't pulling their weight. And it eventually sours their relationship with God as well. God becomes an unfair taskmaster and his work is a burden. You've seen it. I've seen it. Jesus sees it, and Jesus replies: "*If you truly understood who I am, you'd be much less concerned about what you can do for me, and much more interested in what I can do for you.*"

2. Mary. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to his word. That phrase, "sat at his feet" isn't so much talking about where she sat, but *how* she sat. To "sit" at someone's "feet" was an ancient way of saying, listening, learning, knowing, submitting, and obeying someone's teaching. Why? Didn't she know there was so much to do and prepare to serve Jesus? She knew. She knew exactly who was in her house- which is why when he came in, she forgot about the meal, she forgot about the house, she forgot all about what she could do for him, and focused on him. Just him. And sat and enjoyed him for him. She listened to his Word. She submitted to his Word- if he said it, it was true, regardless of what she thought. She enjoyed his Word, it was her delight. Martha is saying, "*Don't you know who this is?*" Mary is saying, "*I know exactly who this is, which is why all I want is to listen to him.*" Because Mary knows that if Jesus is really who he says he is, it doesn't matter how tidy and beautiful her house is- he sat on the throne of Heaven being praised by angels. The food- sure, that'll come, but if Jesus wanted to, he could give them endless bread forever. He is the one who opens his hand and satisfies the hunger of every living thing. She knew she didn't have to impress him, he knew exactly who she was, every single sin, every single flaw, and that he forgave her, loved her, and wanted to speak to her. The God of the Universe was in *her* house! And he was speaking. How could she *not* listen? How could she possibly think that she had anything that he didn't already have? She's the one who needed him, not the other way around. But here's the thing- that doesn't mean that Mary didn't serve Jesus. She did. Some time later, after Jesus had returned to Bethany, raised their brother Lazarus from the dead, he was in a house eating a meal with Lazarus, and Mary came and took a jar of pure nard, a fragrant substance that cost a year's wages, and poured it on his feet and washed his feet with her hair. She knew how valuable he was, and Jesus says, "*She has anointed me for my burial.*" She knew that he was going to die an important, costly, sacrificial death. Can you think

of anyone during Jesus' ministry that truly understood that Jesus needed to die for sins? His own disciples didn't understand that, although he told them plainly, they were so blinded by their culturally embedded expectations of a conquering military Messiah that they didn't understand that Jesus needed to die. How is it that Mary understood what Jesus had truly come to do, but his disciples didn't? Because Mary sat at his feet in a way few others did. And when she sat at his feet, she learned how sinful she truly was, how wrong she had been, but she also knew that Jesus had come to be her sacrifice, to die in her place so she, even she, could be accepted and loved by a holy God. So she listened. *And she served, but she listened first.*

What will happen when you sit at Jesus' feet? What happens when you read God's Word, not just for five minutes to get a little inspiration for the day, but read and listen in order to know God, to know his will, to hear what he has to say to you and allow it to change your opinions, stances, and attitudes? You will be challenged. You will be humbled. You will be exposed. The Law of God is a double edged sword, and if you let God's voice penetrate you without shaking it off as "antiquated," you will be forced to see that you are selfish, lost, blind, foolish, and deserving of God's wrath. But you also see, and hear and know a God who loves you more than you'd ever dare imagine, who willingly was murdered in your place, and who wants nothing more than *you, just you*. Only at Jesus' feet will you know just how loved, important, valuable, and forgiven you truly are. Put down your work, all the things you do for Jesus which are good and noble, and *sit* at Jesus' feet. Yes, it's hard, because in order to truly find joy and time to simply enjoy Jesus' Gospel, you have to admit that you need him a lot more than he needs you. But there's nothing more liberating than knowing that God already delights in you, already loves you, already accepts you before you do a thing. That is why we simply sit, then serve, but first, sit and listen.

Application: Often, I use this lesson to teach people the importance of going to Church- and I stand by that. Saying, "I'm a Christian, but I don't really care for church," is like saying, "I love my Dad, but I don't actually want to spend time with him!" If you love Christ, you naturally have a desire to hear his voice and sit at his feet more often than you go to the dentist. But I also want you to chew on this. These words are from an American writer named Stanley High, who wrote an article in 1937, a time when most Americans regularly went to church, called, "Why I go to Church.": *"I go to church for the same reason that I go to the theater- because I get something out of it. What I get is different. But it is something that I want and I have not found any other place where I can get it. I think it is important to have something to revere- a banner, or a cause, or a person that is bigger than we are and better than we are when we are at our best; some place where, now and again, we can climb down from our high horses, and are in proportion. Bumptiousness is no virtue, despite its prevalence among intelligent people. I go reverently, because I believe in God. But if I did not believe in Him, I would go anyway- out of reverence for the size of the mystery with which the little we know is surrounded.*

It is very much like having an annual physical overhauling or seeing your dentist twice a year. Except that in the area where the church operates, I think most of us need to be overhauled oftener than that..

Is this man a Christian? He goes to church every Sunday, and thinks more people should. He likes church. His reasons for going seem noble enough, he needs to be instructed in how to live, he wants to gain a deeper perspective, be a part of something and someone bigger than himself. You know who he never mentions? Jesus. It's very possible to sit in a pew every Sunday but not actually sit at Jesus' feet. This was written 90 years ago, and this mentality continues to be a plague in American churches: people sitting in the pews without actually sitting at Jesus' feet, submitting to him, learning from him, allowing him to convict and forgive, trusting in him, truly serving him. My friends, everything you do for Jesus is wonderful, beautiful, glorious, noticed by Jesus, and I'm very thankful for everything you all do for him. But before you serve, you must listen. Before you work, you must sit at his feet. And when you understand who he is, and what he's done for you, there's no place you'd rather be. Amen.