The Real Jesus # 9 "Mary and Martha" Luke 10:38-42

“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But 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, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42

I. What Do We Learn About Martha?

- **She is someone Jesus loves.** We see this in the way He addresses her, "Martha, Martha" (vs. 41) – repeating a name in this culture is an expression of deep care and emotion. (For example, David cries “Absalom, Absalom” when he hears of his son’s death.)

- **She is a leader.** It's her house not Mary's or Lazarus' (vs. 38), and we see how she takes charge of things in John 11 when Lazarus dies as well.

- **She's serving Jesus!** This passage is not contrasting secular work (Martha) with sacred work (Mary) as the Medieval Church interpreted this passage. Martha is rather like a Christian who fills her life with religious activity! She wants to hear Jesus too! But she is distracted with (literally in the Greek) “much serving.”

- **Jesus is not condemning work, obviously work needs to be done, but Jesus wants to get to her heart motivation. Why is she so stressed out?** We need to say that women in this culture were treated dreadfully, as little more than slaves and expected to do all the work. But, I think this passage, by saying “distracted by much serving”, implies that she has taken on more than she needed to here. She could be serving out of guilt, trying to earn God’s smile, or she could be stressed out by just doing what is expected of her by the culture without rethinking things now that Jesus is here. Perhaps she is frustrated that using her gifts of service and responsibility are not getting what she wants and is jealous of her sister.

- **Martha feels taken advantage of and what’s worse, it’s not getting her what she wants (closeness to her savior).** The irony is that this access is freely given – perhaps she is staying at a distance to try to pay for it.

**Application: How do you know if you are "Martha"? What are the signs?**

- **You are in inner turmoil (vs. 41)** Your life is filled with non-negotiable goals! You’ve taken on more than you can handle. Martha seems to be involved in elaborate preparations, more than was needed. In her business she has lost sight of the important things. And remember, she is serving Jesus!

- **She is irritable** especially with “spiritual” people who (in her view) don’t like to work, and she feels no one cares about her, including Jesus! (vs. 40)

- **She is mad at God (vs. 40) although she probably doesn’t even recognize this about herself.** She thinks she's doing it for God but really she's doing it to justify herself to others! She even takes to ordering Jesus (God) around!

- **She doesn’t think Jesus cares for her and her situation.** Thus she has imagined Him to be something less than He is – in order words, she has turned Him into an idol. Once this happens, then it seems reasonable for her to take on all the burdens of the world as she does.

**In our day, college students have particular cultural facts that drive us to Martha rather than Mary (as David Brooks discusses in his brilliant new book “On Paradise Drive”, the sequel to Bobos In Paradise)** Several helpful things he points out are:

- **Students have been measured and evaluated their whole lives and thus they are constantly feeling like life is an aptitude test which requires tangible results.** It is hard to pursue Mary’s model in such a mindset.

- **We are driven not as much by the past as we are by the future and the dreams of possibilities waiting to be realized.** Brooks calls this the “Paradise Spell” and say it is what makes us very driven people. One example, for the 1st time in history, the executives at the top of the ladder work more hours than those at the bottom, not because they have to but because they want to!

- **We are so driven by the feeling that we should develop ourselves to the fullest that we can’t ever rest – even though resting may be the path that Jesus has laid out for us!** Remember, Christianity begins the week with the day of rest and all the activity of the week flows out of that. **Why are you so busy, really?**
II. Who Is The Real Jesus? (He is not like the idol Martha imagines)

- **Even in His rebuke of Martha, He is gentle.** He does care for her and her situation!
- **Jesus Himself models “the Mary way” as the road to greatness** – He is the apprentice Son who listens to His Father and does what He hears and sees His Father do.

Who Is Mary? What does it mean to sit at Jesus' feet?

- **She "listens at His feet"** She spends focused time, sitting under the authority of God's Word. (Greek says she sits herself – she takes the initiative.) Sitting at someone’s feet was the position of a disciple and one under authority. "Sitting at Jesus' feet in the mundane busyness of life is the key to being great" (Tim Keller)
- **We must sit and listen to Jesus before we run off and do all kinds of stuff, assuming we know what His kingdom is about.** This is true for conservatives and liberals!
- **Because she sits, she gets it -- unlike even the disciples!** (As we see in John 12) In this culture women were not encouraged to listen to rabbis – but she somehow knows that Jesus is different. She feels welcomed and uses the free access He has granted to cultural outsiders to sit at His feet.

Jesus is the One to be listened to! (cf. Luke 8:15, 21) Beware of getting caught up in so much religious activity that you miss listening to Jesus by sitting at His feet. This is a common trap for evangelicals – but also for those concerned for changing the world!

It is interesting to note that this passage is probably not in chronological order – rather the material seems to be arranged thematically because Luke is wanting to make sure that after the parable of the Good Samaritan that we don’t think that religious deeds of mercy are what saves us and to drive home the point of listening to Jesus and His Word. The point is, religious people are very vulnerable to the Martha Syndrome.

- **Jesus upsets the cultural taboos because of His love for the oppressed!**

Rabbinical writings in the Mishna and Talmud, although written down after the first century, reflect practices that were contemporaneous with the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. The following four social norms were practiced in Jesus' day.

1. **Women were to be shunned in public social contact.**
2. **Women were not to be publicly taught the Torah.** This was not true in the Old Testament period (e.g., Josh. 8:35; Neh. 8:2-3).
3. **Women were restricted from orally communicating the Torah to others, even to children.** Consider Mishna Kiddushin 4,13: 4. Women did not have the right to bear public witness in judicial cases

- **Jesus is not a religious pluralist** – He says Mary has chosen the better way! Even if you are more comfortable being a doer – you must be like Mary to be Jesus’ disciple. This doesn’t mean religious activity is bad, but you must be honest about why you are doing what you’re doing. Is activity a “safer” path than true intimacy? Is activity a more tangible way for you to know where you stand with Jesus? Does it seem more efficient and practical than sitting at Jesus’ feet?

- **There are lots of reasons that we act like Martha rather than Mary.** And Jesus is teaching here that Martha’s main problem is she is not hearing what Jesus is teaching. What are the things He is teaching she needs to hear?

1. “Martha Martha” Jesus says, “Martha, I love you, I care about you and the mess you’ve gotten yourself into”
2. “Mary has chosen the better way” – even though the religious people say it is a way closed to her – I say she is welcome to come and sit at my feet! And so are you Martha!
3. “You are distracted by many things” What are distracted by? Why are you so busy? What are the non-negotiables in your life and why are they so important to you really?
4. Those who sit at my feet will never have their place taken away from them. I will die to secure that place!