

Only One Thing is Needed

Luke 10:38-42

Key Verse: 10:42

“...but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Living in the 21st century in North America is not easy. Each day we are bombarded with information about many things that seem important. We are challenged to be conscious of our health, family relationships, friends and community, the state of the world, the economy, and the environment. Furthermore, in the age of material abundance and advanced technology, we face pressure to upgrade everything by getting a new computer, a hybrid car, a big screen plasma television, a smart phone, an i-pad, and so on. And for us in Christian ministry, there is the added responsibility of carrying out God's mission. In this kind of environment, how can we balance our families, study, work, and ministry? We need help in navigating meaningfully through daily life. We can find wisdom from Jesus today. Jesus teaches us that only one thing is needed. What is it? How can we have it? Let's find out.

I. Martha opened her home to Jesus (38-40)

Luke begins this story with the words, **“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way....”** Jesus had resolutely set out for Jerusalem, where he would suffer, die and rise again. Compelled by divine compassion, he determined to bring God's world salvation plan to fulfillment. He was accompanied by his disciples, who did not quite know what was going on. Luke does not say how many disciples--whether it was the Twelve, or the larger circle of the 72. In either case, it was a considerable company.

Verse 38b says, **“...he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.”** In sending out the 72, Jesus had told them to say, **“Peace to this house,”** as they entered a home. When they were welcomed, they were to stay there. Martha's home was a good example of this. She received Jesus with great respect and called him “Lord.” She **“opened her home to him,”** ready to care for him and his disciples. In the Middle East, showing hospitality was important. Hosts were expected to meet all the demands of their guests until the guests sat back fully contented, with smiles on their faces. This required sacrifice, service, and hard work. It is not easy for a woman to **“open her home”** to others. If she has been lazy in cleaning, she may feel ashamed. If she does not like to cook, she may feel too burdened. She may simply want to protect the privacy of

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her home. At that time, Martha's only helper was Mary. To these two women, the intrusion of Jesus and his company might have felt like the invasion of a small army of smelly, hungry men. Still, Martha willingly opened her home to Jesus.

We can learn from Martha to open our homes to Jesus and his people. We also see many good examples among us. Mother Barry's house sometimes resembles an inn. She welcomes and serves Jesus' people from all over the world who are passing through Chicago. She serves them with good food, wholesome fellowship, deep Bible study, and effective prayers. Dr. John Jun has opened the Riyadh "restaurant" by the help of M. Deborah Lim and other women missionaries. They have refreshed Jesus' people with delicious food, joyful fellowship and wholehearted prayers. I sincerely hope that all of us may open our homes to Jesus and his people, like Martha did. This is the way to obtain a rich blessing from the Lord (Heb 13:2). However, it requires a decision of faith, especially on the part of the women in the home.

When Jesus came in, he wanted to give the best blessing to those who had warmly welcomed him. So he began to teach the word of God to them. The word of God opens our hearts to the marvelous spiritual world so that we can see the kingdom of God. This gives us hope, no matter what situation we are in. The word of God helps us to transcend our self-centered view of things and enables us to see from God's point of view. The word of God gives us wisdom for salvation in this troubled world (1 Ti 3:15). The word of God is the best blessing to anyone. Jesus did not preach from a pulpit, but he sat down in the casual surroundings of the living room and began to share the word of God in a conversational style. As soon as Jesus began to speak, Mary's heart was drawn to him. She heard the voice of her good Shepherd and she began to listen very carefully. She sat at his feet with rapt attention, and soaked in every word he was saying. She must have let Jesus' words inscribe themselves on her heart. She not only wanted to remember them in her mind, but to live by them in daily life. Though there were many people around, to Mary it felt that she was having a one-to-one Bible study with the Son of God, who had come to earth just to speak to her. She forgot everything else and gave herself fully to Jesus' teaching.

Martha was welcome to join Jesus for graceful Bible study. But verse 40 says she was "distracted by all the preparations that had to be made." Martha could not concentrate on Jesus' words. Rather, they became like background noise as she thought of the practical work that needed to be done. She calculated the number of people there, and how much each one needed to eat to be satisfied. She considered which kind of food might be best: fish, or lamb, or beef, or all three. She took

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mental inventory of her pantry to decide if she needed to do some emergency shopping. Did she have a proper dessert? Did she have enough wine? Soon, she had a mental list of things that needed to be done, with a time schedule. Then she began dividing the labor. There were just two workers, her and Mary. So Mary's help was essential for any chance of success. She tried to get Mary's attention with a nod and motion to come out and help her. But Mary was oblivious. Mary looked right through Martha as if she were not there and kept on listening to Jesus. Martha felt irritation and a sense of injustice rising inside of her. Mary was going to leave her alone to do the work by herself!

Then Martha looked at Jesus. Jesus was teaching the word of God with all his heart as though nothing else mattered. Martha felt that Jesus was ignoring her. She also felt that Jesus was enabling Mary to avoid her responsibility to serve others. Martha felt that she was left all alone with an impossible task. Perhaps a twinge of jealousy pierced her heart as she watched Jesus speaking so intimately to Mary. For a while, Martha silently entertained feelings of loneliness and a sense of injustice. She hesitated to interrupt Jesus' Bible study. But she could not keep quiet. She may have thought that this was, after all, her home, and that she had the right to say who would do what in her home. So she went to Jesus and said, with a sense of indignation, **"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"** She wanted Jesus to sympathize with her situation and to order Mary to help her.

How could Martha say such a thing to Jesus? She must have felt strongly that she was right. We should try to understand her. Martha was the oldest sister. She bore the responsibility of managing a home in that male dominant culture. She had to be diligent and work hard, as a matter of survival. She might have shed many tears in secret as she protected Mary from the hard world. She must have expected Mary to be grateful, loyal, and available to help. Many of us would agree with Martha's work ethic. American culture has been influenced by a Puritan work ethic. Mayflower Pilgrims had to build protective shelters after surviving the first hard winter. Governor John Winthrop demanded that everyone work hard and that they work together without exception. An English nobleman, Richard Saltonstall, objected to this. But Governor Winthrop was uncompromising. He demanded Mr. Saltonstall and every person in the group to do hard physical labor every day. Governor Winthrop set the example by working harder than all others. After personal devotion in the early morning, they worked from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. every day. Historians credit this hard work as an important factor in the success of Plymouth colony, in contrast to the colony at Jamestown, which failed due to the laziness and selfishness of the members. People should work hard, and this should

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be valued. However, hard work is not the most important thing. Let's see how Jesus helped Martha.

II. Jesus rebuked Martha in love (41-42)

We can imagine that Jesus took a pause after hearing Martha's words. Then he might have turned toward her and given his whole attention as he began to address her. Look at verses 41-42. **“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.’”** We learn at least two things from Jesus' words.

First, Jesus helped Martha find the problem in herself. Jesus did not agree with Martha that Mary had a problem. Jesus found the problem in Martha. Jesus diagnosed her as **“worried and upset about many things.”** Worry displeases Jesus, regardless of the cause. Worry makes people desperate and disgraceful. Jesus had often warned his disciples not to worry. Worry is a symptom of practical unbelief. It stems from trying to manage life, work and situations without acknowledging God and his love, protection, provision and blessing. How did Martha become so worried? It began when she allowed herself to be distracted from Jesus' words. Though she had welcomed Jesus into her home, she had not welcomed him into her heart as Lord. She did not give first priority to his words and come to understand his mind and heart. Instead, as he began to teach, she proceeded with her own plan, taking charge of her life, her home and Mary. She even tried to use Jesus to rebuke Mary. Martha's problem was not that she worked hard. Martha's problem was that she did not yield to Jesus as Lord of her heart. Then she could not be a blessing, even though she worked hard. She was miserable and she made the people around her miserable. We can learn here that when we feel worried and upset, we should try to find the problem in ourselves before blaming others.

Second, Jesus taught Martha that only one thing was needed. Let's read verse 42 together. **“...but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”** Jesus said that only one thing was needed. What was that? It was Jesus himself. It was to receive Jesus as Lord from her heart and to have a right relationship with him. When Jesus reigns in our hearts, he restores spiritual order in us. He opens our way to God himself, who fills us with love, joy, peace, and strength. He gives us clear direction for life so that we can set right priorities. He gives us access to endless resources and practical wisdom so that we can manage all that needs to be done. Work for Jesus is not a

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burden, but a precious privilege. The Apostle Paul worked harder than all others. But he did not complain about his great burden and his lazy coworkers. Rather, he credited Jesus' marvelous grace upon him. He wrote, "...--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor 15:10b). He also wrote, **"Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"** (1 Th 5:16-18). If Martha had this attitude, her work for Jesus would have been a joy. **Only one thing is needed: Jesus as Lord in our hearts.**

We learn how to receive Jesus from Mary. She had chosen the best blessing from Jesus, which is to listen to his word. She did not try to do something, but first listened to Jesus. She could learn Jesus' mind and his heart. This pleases Jesus most. So we must listen to Jesus with an attitude of obedience to his words. Then Jesus will come into our hearts. Jesus said in John 14:23, **"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."**

When he said, **"only one thing is needed,"** Jesus emphasized that he wants a relationship with us more than our work for him. By our own work we could never make a right relationship with Jesus. This can happen only when we first accept his grace of forgiveness through his death on the cross. Only then can we be equipped to do something for Jesus. Therefore, our day should not begin with work, but with prayer and Daily Bread. We should maintain our relationship with Jesus as of first importance. When we feel burdened, we should come to Jesus in prayer. Then he will give us everything we need to serve him joyfully. Let's hold on to this truth: **"only one thing is needed: Jesus."**

At this time of Easter Bible Conference preparation, it is easy to feel that we have many things to do. But Jesus said, **"only one thing is needed."** It is to listen to Jesus and accept his death and resurrection in our hearts. Then he will bless us and our conferences abundantly. Without Jesus we can do nothing. As I prepared this message, I remembered an Easter Bible Conference of about fifteen years ago. I felt that I had many things to do as the overseer of one conference. But the night before the conference, Dr. Samuel Lee asked me to come to his office and type something for him. I went with a burdened heart, hoping to finish quickly and then return to conference preparation. But Dr. Lee did not let me go. He asked me to do trivial things for him, one after another. I felt he was going to keep me with him for several days. Finally I expressed my frustration. Then he told me, **"Only one thing is needed; it is to have Jesus in your heart."** I was deeply convicted of my "Martha mentality." I could not but repent and ask the Lord's mercy. Then Jesus

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came into my heart, and Dr. Lee said, “Please go and serve your conference.” My burdens disappeared and I was free to love and serve Jesus and others with joy. God blessed the conference abundantly.

We may have many things to do, but only one thing is needed. Let’s accept Jesus in our hearts who suffered and died for us and rose again. Then Jesus will bless us, and our work, to be most fruitful.