

## MARY HAS CHOSEN WHAT IS BETTER

Luke 10:38-42

Key Verses: 10:41-42

*“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”*

In today’s passage, Jesus is at the home of Martha and Mary in Bethany. Just before entering Jerusalem where he would suffer and die, Jesus stayed in their house, teaching them the word of God. Jesus taught the word of God even as his death approached. We learn that we must study and teach the Bible as of first importance. We also learn that our personal fellowship with the Lord must be the top priority in our busy life.

### I. JESUS WAS ON HIS WAY (38a)

Look at verse 38a. *As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, ...* Luke says Jesus and his disciples were on their way. Where was Jesus going? He was on his way to Jerusalem. Jesus was headed toward the city of Jerusalem to die on a cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). Now if you knew that you are going to a city where you will be arrested, tortured, and killed, you would drag your feet not to go there. You would make many excuses to delay the trip as long as possible. But Jesus didn’t do that. Luke says in 9:51, “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” Jesus did not drag his feet. Instead, he resolutely set out for Jerusalem. He was determined to fulfill God’s redemptive plan for you and me. He knew that terrible suffering and death were waiting for him in the city. But he also knew that God would glorify him by raising him from the dead and he would be taken up to heaven.

As he set out for Jerusalem resolutely, what did Jesus do? As we learned earlier, he prepared his disciples for his sufferings and helped them to be spiritual leaders for his people after his departure. He asked them the question, “Who do you say I am?” He was happy when they confessed him as their Messiah, the Savior sent by God. Then he began to teach them about his upcoming suffering, death and resurrection. He also told them about the cost of discipleship. But they were not interested in his suffering, because they didn’t want to suffer with him. They wanted him to be king in Jerusalem who would restore the kingdom of Israel from the Roman oppression. They wanted to secure high positions in his earthly kingdom. So they began to argue who was the greatest among them. They would not listen to his words. So he took them to a high mountain and showed his true image as the Son of God. Moses and Elijah, two suffering servants in Israel’s history, appeared and talked to Jesus about his departure. Then a voice from the cloud spoke to them and said, “Listen to him!” God told them to listen to Jesus.

Jesus also sent them out on a training mission so that they could continue the evangelistic work after his death. Traveling from village to village, they proclaimed the kingdom of God and healed the sick. They were happy when even demons obeyed them. But Jesus told them to rejoice because their names were written in heaven. Finally, Jesus taught them to love the Lord and love their neighbors as themselves by telling them the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus was a good shepherd for the disciples to the end.

## II. MARTHA OPENED HER HOME TO JESUS (38b)

Look at verse 38 again. *As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.* Martha and Mary had a special relationship with Jesus. They lived in Bethany, a small town 2 miles east of Jerusalem, with their brother Lazarus (Jn 11:1). They did not have parents with them. Lazarus was the only man of the house, but he was weak and sickly. To this family, Jesus was like their father. Whenever Jesus visited Jerusalem, he stayed in their home, instead of Holiday Inn. Martha welcomed Jesus and his disciples, and served them with delicious food every time.

John 11 describes how much Jesus loved this family. When Lazarus became sick and was dying, the sisters sent an urgent message to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” They expected that Jesus would drop everything and run to them in a hurry. However, Jesus delayed his trip two days, on purpose. The Bible says that Jesus loved Martha and Mary and that’s why he stayed where he was two more days (Jn 11:5-6). So when he arrived, Lazarus was already dead and buried in a tomb. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Mary also said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” They were bitter. They did not understand why Jesus didn’t come sooner. Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (Jn 11:24-25). Jesus delayed his trip to make sure their brother was dead so that he could help them to have resurrection faith. Jesus’ love is much deeper than any human love. But the sisters were still overwhelmed by their brother’s death. They would not listen to him. Jesus wept (Jn 11:35). Finally, Jesus went to the tomb and called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. It was an unbelievable scene. Jesus brought back their brother from dead. How else could Jesus help them better to have resurrection faith!

Now Jesus was in town for the last time as he would be soon crucified as the Lamb of God. As usual, Martha welcomed him and his disciples with open arms. What does it mean that Martha opened her home to Jesus? To Jewish people, the home was a sacred place for their family. They were very careful about whom to invite to their homes. But Martha opened her home to Jesus, because she loved him. We know that hosting a large group of men is not easy. You have to have good amount of supplies of food and many preparations. The summer of 2016 was a busy one for the Hwang family as they had to serve three children from Korea with great appetite for food. When we

expect guests to our house, M. Deborah would get busy before they arrive, going to grocery, preparing food, changing bed sheets, and cleaning the bathrooms. Martha knew that there would be a lot of work involved in caring for Jesus and his disciples who were always hungry. But she opened her home to them. Martha was a hardworking and generous woman. Generosity, hospitality and hardworking were the gifts of Martha, and she put them to use. Likewise, we should put to use our gifts that God has given us. We are thankful that our worship team--Dream, Mary and Ezra--put to use their talents to help us praise and worship the Lord. It is important for us to put to use our talents to serve the Lord and others. If we only boast about our talents and abilities but do not put them to use, we become like the wicked servant in Jesus' parable of talents. The man dug in the ground and buried his talent, instead of putting it to work (Mt 25:14-30). Jesus called him a wicked servant. Martha put to use her talents by opening her home to Jesus and his disciples and serving them through her hard work.

### III. ONLY ONE THING IS NEEDED (39-42)

Look at verse 39. *She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.* Jesus needed physical and spiritual rest before the impending sufferings in Jerusalem. But he was teaching the word of God. Bible study was his first priority no matter where and no matter when. He really wanted to give them the word of life for the one last time. Mary understood this and sat at the Lord's feet, listening carefully to what he said. This was the same Mary who had poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair (Jn 11:2). While her sister Martha was busy with cooking, Mary listened attentively to what Jesus said. The Bible study took a long time. The disciples' stomachs began to growl. But a tremendous joy and hope of God filled Mary's heart as she studied the word of God with Jesus. She now had the assurance of eternal life. She had the hope of the kingdom of God in her heart.

Then her sister entered the living room. Look at verse 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!"* The author Luke says, "Martha was distracted by all the preparations." Martha missed the point of Jesus' coming. She didn't realize that Jesus really wanted to have a fellowship time with her. Jesus wanted her to listen to him and receive the words of eternal life. But Martha was distracted. She was concerned about the potatoes that needed to be peeled and the onions that needed to be chopped. She was out of spinach and oregano. How could she prepare a decent meal without them? The kitchen was becoming messy and the sink was full. Like Martha Stewart, she wanted everything to be perfect and proper. But her sister Mary was not helping her. She was sitting down when there was so much work to be done. Martha couldn't take it anymore. She came to Jesus to complain. She expressed her frustration toward Jesus as well as Mary. She complained to Jesus for not caring. She wanted him to rebuke her sister for being lazy, selfish and indifferent.

Martha's protest was reasonable. We know that it is not easy to prepare dinner for a large group of guests. It would be difficult even when two people work together.

But Martha did everything alone, making a huge pot of soup and baking several loaves of bread, while at the same time, setting the table. And she did not even have a microwave oven or a blender. But her sister Mary did not lift a finger to help her. So we can understand why Martha was upset and complained to Jesus.

How did Jesus help her? Look at verses 41-42. *“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”* Jesus rebuked Martha. Now, before we think about his rebuke, let us make one thing clear. Jesus did not rebuke Martha for her service. Her serving was beautiful and necessary. In fact, it is interesting to note that this event happened right after Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. In the parable, the priest and the Levite did not do anything to help the man who was left to die on the road. They just passed by him on the other side of the road. Only the Samaritan saved his life by bandaging him, putting oil on him, carrying him to an inn and paying for the expenses. Then Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.” Jesus taught that loving a neighbor means doing something good to save him or her. Luke also mentions several women who helped to support Jesus and his disciples out of their own means as they traveled to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God (Lk 8:1-3). They knew the grace of God upon their lives. They loved Jesus. They willingly served him and his ministry. Without their service, Jesus and his disciples would have suffered malnutrition. We know that it was not Jesus’ intention to marginalize the serving heart of Martha. Nor did he want to rebuke her hardworking attitude.

So what was Martha’s problem? Why did Jesus rebuke her? “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things.” Jesus loved her and called her, “Martha, Martha.” Then he rebuked her for being worried and upset about many things. Jesus also rebuked her for suggesting that Mary’s choice was inferior to hers. On the contrary, Mary had chosen better, Jesus told her. Mary appeared to be irresponsible and not caring. But her heart was in the right place. She loved Jesus. Because she loved Jesus, Mary listened to him very carefully to receive the word of life from him. On the other hand, Martha was working hard to serve Jesus and his disciples. She loved Jesus, too, in her own way. She probably thought her way of loving and serving was better than Mary’s. She tried to do her best to please, to serve, to do the right thing. However, Martha was so busy-minded that she did not understand what Jesus was doing. Jesus was headed to Jerusalem for the last time. He wanted to spend time with them, helping them understand what he was about to do. But Martha did not know what Jesus wanted her to do and what he wanted to do for her. She did not know that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem to die for the sin of the world. She did not know because she was distracted by many things. She was only worried about all the details. Martha tried to serve the Lord in her own way and did not realize that it was not the food that could please him but her heart’s desire.

Look at verses 41-42 again. *“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”* Jesus wanted

Martha to have spiritual priority in her life. Jesus recognized that Martha was working hard for him and his disciples, but he reminded her that she was permitting her outward activities to hinder her spiritually. It was okay if the soup got a little cold as long as her heart was warm. Because of her emphasis on work, her personal relationship with her Lord suffered.

God saved us from our sin and death through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. He also called us to serve campus mission that gives us a purpose and direction in life. So we are happy to work hard for the Lord, while waiting for his Second Coming. However, we must ask ourselves the question, “Am I so busy doing things for Jesus that I’m not spending enough personal time with him?” It is pointless to work hard if our service for the Lord becomes self-serving. Besides, our work for the Lord can become burdensome to us if our focus is on the work rather than Jesus. We may become upset and complain if we think we do more work than others, as Martha did. So if we become upset and feel like complaining about others not doing enough, we should ask ourselves the question, “Am I doing this really for the Lord or for my own ego?” If we serve the Lord out of our love for him, we can joyfully serve him no matter what others are doing.

We must learn from Martha’s mistake that getting caught up in details can make us forget the main reasons for our service. We also learn that there is a proper time to listen to Jesus and a proper time to work for him. Having a personal fellowship with the Lord is more important than anything we could possibly do for Jesus.

Finally Jesus said, “*Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.*” Mary chose to be with Jesus. She chose to listen to his word. What she chose will not be taken away from her. All our human achievements are temporary. They have no eternal value. God’s word is different. It gives us eternal life. No one can take it away from us. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Lk 21:33).

We often want many things done, but many things make us worried and upset. We learn that we must listen to the word of Christ as our first priority. We need a deep personal relationship with the Lord through our Bible study and prayer. Then we can realize what really pleases our Lord and we can have the overflowing joy of serving him. May the Holy Spirit help us to set spiritual priorities in our lives!