

Luke 10:38-42 -One Thing Needed

Big idea: Our relationship with God is more important than our works.

Introduction

- If you can still recall, two weeks ago Bob Prior preached on the topic of praying – specifically praying for the unsaved. Reminding us of the importance of praying to God and the need to cultivate a prayerful spirit.
- And last week, Bob preached on Hebrews 12. Encouraging all of us to continue persevering for God. Running the race that is set before us and enduring all sorts of hostility and temptation from the world.
- So over the past two weeks we were given two very important lessons that are key to becoming a faithful Christian:
 - 1. Cultivating a prayerful spirit.
 - 2. Persevering for God.
- While these two things are critical and essential for every Christian – there is still one thing necessary that we simply cannot neglect.
- And I am referring to the Word of God.
 - I am referring to making the Word of God a priority in your life.
- And so this morning I want to spend some time breaking down Luke 10:38-42 with you, so that you may see why God’s word should be given more priority over the things we do!
- So please keep your bibles opened to Luke 10 so you can follow along carefully.

The bigger picture!

- But before we dig deep into these short but rich verses, it’s always profitable to ask ourselves how all this fits into the bigger picture
- You will come to realise that the previous 37 verses are linked to this passage.
- Because the whole of chapter 10, Luke presents us three scenarios all of which show us that we tend to overemphasize on the things that we do!
 - We tend to overemphasize on our works than on God.
 - That is a problem!
- Now I don’t want to spend so much time going through each case in detail, but simply provide a brief summary so that you have a better understanding of how it all fits.
- Let me draw your attention back near the start of Luke 10, to the story of the Seventy-Two.

The return of the Seventy-Two

- In v17, the Seventy-Two return excited about the fact that even the demons submit to them in the name of Jesus.
- There is a sense in which they come back saying: “Jesus look at what we have been doing, look at how successful our doing has been”.
- And of course, Jesus corrects their faulty thinking by saying in v20:
 - “Don’t rejoice that the spirits submit to you, don’t rejoice in what you have apparently been doing, but rejoice in what God has done by writing your names in heaven”

The good Samaritan

- We then go on to the story of the good Samaritan in v25, which is essentially a question that has again to do with doing.
- The lawyer asks Jesus what he is supposed to be doing in order to inherit eternal life.

- And Jesus corrects him by saying:
 - “The real issue here is not what you are supposed to be doing, or who is your neighbour? But rather the real issue here is are you a neighbour to the person who is in need?”

Martha and Mary

- Now when we come back to verses 38-42, the concern is once again about doing.
- Especially when Martha approaches Jesus and orders Him to tell Mary to start doing!
- But Jesus replies saying:
 - “Martha I’m not particularly concerned at the moment about doing, I’m more concerned about whether you are spending time listening to me”
- And so the takeaway here is that *God is more concerned with who we are in terms of our relationship with Him, rather than on the things we do for Him.*
- This means that seeking God first and listening to His word is a priority over our work.
- And I will elaborate more on this as I go.
- So what I want to do today is to look into each character presented to us in this passage – starting with Martha. But before that let me set the scene for you.

Context

- In verse 38, the story begins with Jesus and His disciples journeying towards Jerusalem with the purpose to fulfil what was prophesied in the Old Testament.
 - Jesus had a mission to bring salvation to all who believe in Him by sacrificing Himself on the cross, and crucified for our sins and then risen on the third day.
- But before He reached His final destination in which the event unfolds, along His journey, Jesus stops by a village.
 - In John 11, we are told that the name of this village is Bethany, which is home to Martha, her sister Mary, and also her brother Lazarus who is not mentioned here.
 - But if you know the story from the gospel of John, this is the same person that Jesus raised from the dead.

Martha

- So now let’s turn our attention to Martha.
- She may have been the elder of the three siblings and she may be identified as the maternal figure in the house.
 - So if anything were to happen in the house, it would safe to assume that she would be the one making all the decisions.
- Here she is, swinging the doors wide open to welcome her esteemed guest into her home.
 - And we know that this guest is none other than Jesus Himself!
- And because of this, she may be the one to be mostly identified with hospitality.
- Now isn’t that a good thing? To be hospitable?

(slide Leviticus 19:33-34, Hebrews 13:2, 1 Timothy 3:2-3) – slide 1

- From both Old and New testament references, hospitality is a Christian virtue that is both commanded and commended.
- In the epistles we are told that those who are involved in the leadership of the church, should be the kind of individuals who themselves are demonstrating hospitality.
- The point is, it’s a good thing to be hospitable.
- Martha has done a good thing by welcoming Jesus into her home.

Problem with Martha (and us!!!)

- But as we go through the passage, what we will discover is that our good thing becomes the bad thing.
- For many of us, that becomes the predicament.
- We will realise that the things we are particularly good at will result in grounds for discomfort and disgruntlement as a result of our priorities.
- For Martha, it was clear that she is given into hospitality. That's because:
 - She was the one to welcome Jesus into her home.
 - She was also the one who took upon the responsibility to prepare something special for Jesus, presumably a meal, while leaving her sister Mary in the background to entertain the guest.
- It is clear that Martha wanted to do something special for Jesus.
- And it was her commitment to doing something special that she poured all her time and energy into preparing that one meal.
- If you had a special visitor come into your home you would want to do same things that Martha was doing
- However, what we see later in v40, is that what initially appears as godly servanthood and good intentions, later becomes resentment and distraction.
- It was on her account that she wanted to do something really good for Jesus, she ended up doing something really bad because of where she put all her focus.
 - She was focussed on the wrong things!

And we will explore this a bit more now.

- Have a look at v40. The first thing we know about Martha is that she was “distracted”.
- The word “distracted” means to be pulled away, or to be overwhelmed or overburdened with something.
- She was distracted with much serving because all her attention was directed into the preparation of the meal rather than on Jesus.
- She was so fixated on the things that she was doing, rather than on the words that was coming out of Jesus' mouth.
- There was so much stuff that's going on in her head.
- And that's the problem... stuff!!!
- Think of an instance where you have been so overwhelmed with stuff:
 - Work
 - studies
 - family commitments
 - ministry!
- These things can become distractions in our lives if we choose to focus on them at the expense of spending time in God's word.
 - Martha was so distracted with her service that she couldn't spend time listening to God!
- And so what's the result? Martha's attitude changed – not better, but for the worse!

She complained to Jesus in v40:

- “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?” “Do you not care that I’m doing all the work here and she’s doing nothing to help me?” “Go then and tell her to help me!”
- Her good intentions have turned for the worse!
- The moment she stopped listening to the Word of God, she disrupted the harmony that had existed between her and her sister, and also between her and Jesus.
- She became disgruntled and annoyed.
- And this was reflected in the way she spoke to Jesus and the way she treated her sister.
- She even wanted to take away the precious moment that was shared between Jesus and Mary by telling her sister to come help her.
- The problem here is not that Jesus had laid a heavy burden on Martha. The problem is not that the task was too much for her.
- But rather the problem is that Martha had made the task more than it comfortably needed to be.
- Jesus didn’t expect her to prepare a world class meal for Him.
- I’m sure Jesus would have been content with a simple dish.
- Because at that point, what Jesus desired was not the food on the table but rather what He desired was her company – it was her company.
 - Martha saw the preparation of the meal as more of a priority at that time, than spending time with Jesus.
- Jesus wasn’t primarily concerned with what she was doing. He was concerned if she was listening to Him.
- Jesus wanted listening heart. A heart that desires His companionship and yearns to listen to the Word of God.
- Do you have that sort of heart for Jesus? Do you have a heart that actively seeks to listen to the Word of God? Do you get excited when you open your bible to read His word, or do you just treat as if it was just another chore for you?

Jesus’ response

- So now let’s look at how Jesus responds to all this?
- If your children had an attitude like Martha, perhaps you wouldn’t let them off so easily.
- With an attitude like that we would’ve expected Jesus to give Martha a stern warning – but He didn’t!
- But rather it was a very gentle rebuke towards her. Almost with a grandfatherly tone to it.
- He didn’t speak to her in the same way he did harshly to the Pharisees and lawyers as seen in Luke 11:37-54.
- He spoke from the perspective of a loving and caring father.
 - We are told in John 11:5 that Jesus loved them both – He loved both Martha and her sister Mary equally.
- They were both godly, faithful, and exceptional individuals.
- And this is reflected by His tender response.
- He says beginning in v41 “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, v42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”
 - It’s the same as saying “Martha, Martha, I see what you’re doing, I know what you’re trying to do and I love you for it. But I still need to tell you that your sister Mary has done the right thing.”
- And so Jesus doesn’t correct her for her actions. He corrects her for getting her priorities wrong!

- She was so busy preparing and doing things for Jesus, that she neglected the time and opportunity to listen to Him.
- But we shouldn't study this passage thinking we no longer need to care about what we do. And that all we have to do is focus on God and that will be the end of it – we all become monks and sit on the mountainside.
- That's not the point! Because that's a seriously wrong perspective to have!
 - If there is no one serving in café time, then there will be no food and coffee for everyone enjoy
 - If there is no one on sound, then you wouldn't be able to hear what I am saying to you right now.
 - If there is no one in bible kids or creche, then there will be no one to look after the children while you sit in for the sermon.
 - We need faithful servants to welcome people to church, to set up church, to evangelise, to teach, to preach
- Because we're told in James 1:22 we should be doers of the word, and not hearers only.
 - The problem with Martha is that she was only doing, but she wasn't listening!
- And so Jesus' gentle words of correction to Martha set the priorities once more in their proper order.
 - Which is to listen first, and then to do second.
- A contemporary preacher by the name of Alistair Begg simply puts it:
 - "The priority of listening to the Word of God is the foundation of a life of active service to Christ".
- And the only person in the room to really understand this was the one sitting quietly at the feet of Jesus, listening to His teaching, and of course that is none other than Martha's sister; Mary.

Mary

- So let us draw our attention to Mary. We have Martha who is the outspoken, straightforward, service driven individual. And then we have Mary, the one who does not speak a single word at all.
- Have a look at v39, we know two things about Mary:
 - 1. She is sitting at the Lord's feet.
 - 2. She listened to His teaching.
- In the 1st century, it was unheard of for women to sit at the feet of a Jewish teacher and receive his teaching. In fact, it was generally opposed.
 - So if you're a woman in the 1st century, and you wanted to learn God's word, then too bad! Sit at the back of the class.
- But Jesus, completely disregards this notion and happily allows her to sit at His feet.
- And by sitting at His feet, Mary expressed her desire to learn and be close to God
- Her posture is of submission to Christ.
 - She was eager and ready to receive His teaching.
 - Like a pupil to a master.
- And the next thing we know about Mary is that she listened. She listened to His teaching.

- If you're a teacher trying to teach a class, you know that all the students in the room hear what you're saying. But not everyone will listen. Those that have served in BKs would know what I mean.
- Students, if you come across an exam question that you have no idea how to answer. 2 things will pop up in your mind: 1. I messed up, 2. I should have paid attention!
- Every parent lecturing their children would have experienced a moment where the child appears to be unresponsive to what you're saying and so you ask them "are you actually listening to me? Or is it going in one ear and out the other?"
- Jesus wants us to listen. He doesn't want us to just hear. He wants our undivided attention when it comes to spending time in His word.
- We don't just read the bible for the sake of reading it and not having to think and reflect about it.

(Illustration – show slide)

Perhaps some of you may or may not know this guy. Maybe for the young people you may have no idea who he is.

- He goes by the name of Howard Berg. I think he's a bit of a sensation because in 1990 he was recognized in "The Guinness World Records" for his ability to read more than 25,000 words per minute. He also claims to comprehend what he read!
- It's taken us 15-20 minutes on 5 verses... and we're still going!
- I don't know how long it'll take for me to go through the whole bible. Probably never!
- It's a bit small on the screen but the ad says "How to read one page in 3 seconds".
- The point I want to draw across is that we shouldn't be spending time in God's word for the sake of it. We need to listen, to think, and to reflect on His word.
- And that's what Mary did. She listened to His teaching. Her attention was on what Jesus taught.
 - She is the kind of student that always sits in the front of the class and pays close attention to what the teacher says.
 - She is the model student we all ought to follow.
 - And Jesus commends her for it!
- Mary knew what was more important than helping her sister
 - She knew exactly what Jesus wanted of her.
 - Martha thought she knew what Jesus wanted – but she was wrong!

Have a look at v42, Jesus commends Mary for choosing the "good portion"

- And we're told the "good portion" is associated with the "one thing necessary".
- Out of all the good things a Christian ought to do, Mary has chosen the very piece of the pie that is the most important and is the most needed!
- And so what is the one thing that is needed?
 - It is of course to listen to the word of God.
- It is to make the word of God a priority in your life.
- And guess what! Nothing can take that away from you!
 - Nothing can take away God's teaching from you!
 - The meal that Martha prepared for Jesus would've been gone the next day – leaving only scraps on the table.
- The material things we work so hard for do not last until the very day we depart this world.
 - Your house will not remain with you.
 - Your job will not remain with you.
 - Your university degree will not remain with you.
 - But what will remain is the Word of God. Because His word is pure. His word is unchanging. And His word is everlasting.

- In Matthew 24:35 Jesus says to His disciples “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”.
- In John 6:27 He also says to His disciples “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life”.
- In Matthew 4:4 Jesus replies the tempter by saying “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”.

- The good thing for us is that the Word of God is made available to all who desire it!
 - We don’t need to wait for Jesus to physically appear before us so we can sit at His feet and listen to what He has to say.
 - We can access His word through the bible!
 - If you remember from Dom’s preaching a while back on 2 Timothy – we’re told that all scripture is God breathed. That means everything you read in the bible comes directly from God. God speaks to us through His word, through the bible!
 - In Psalm 40:7-8, David tells us that the word of God is also written in our hearts.
 - And so it may involve moments of silence before God in prayer, listening for His voice and reflecting on His teaching.
- The problem is that many of us have such busy schedules in our daily lives that we can’t even spare a single moment of our time to come before God in submission, with an eagerness, a readiness, and a patience to listen to His word.
- We often find ourselves living more like Martha.
 - Being distracted with all sorts of things in our life.
 - Being drawn away from our time spent in His word.
- And so why is it so important we make the Word of God a priority in our lives?
- Just look back at Martha! Look at what happened to her.
- The moment she stopped listening to Jesus, she became troubled and anxious about all the things happening in the background.
- And because of all these things that are weighing on her, her attitude changed.
 - Her attitude towards her sister changed.
 - Her attitude towards Jesus changed.
- Her attitude resulted her being angry, judgmental, disgruntled.
- If Jesus hadn’t corrected her, it could give rise to all sorts of other evil.
- When we begin to neglect spending time reading, listening and reflecting on God’s word, we might eventually find ourselves in a similar position to Martha.
 - Distracted
 - Anxious
 - Troubled
- These things hinder our relationship with God.
- They draw us further away from Him.
- As we think about these things, let me say a few more things about setting our priorities straight.

Application

Make the Word of God a priority in your life.

- It is tempting for us to get swooped by the activities of our daily lives and forget that spending time in God’s word must always have priority over our work.
- And that is a danger for many of us! – especially if you’re involved in ministry!
 - It is temptation for us to think that we are doing the right thing by serving God in our own way rather than in His way.

- We need to ensure that how we serve God is based upon His word and not our own understanding.
- You need to let the word of God to drive and direct what you are doing...
- Brothers and sisters... listen carefully to God's word... and let Him guide you in His wisdom to serve.
- The same goes even if you're not involved with ministry!
 - Some of us are so invested in our jobs, working long hours, that by the time we come back home we would be too tired to do anything else. We just want to head to bed as soon as possible to get our rest. And we repeat this the next day. It's an endless cycle of just doing things.
 - Has work or family commitments deprived you of the time to come before God in prayer, listening to His word, and desiring to be close to Him?
 - Has it deprived you of opportunities to sit and open the bible to read His word?
 - If so, then you should rethink your commitments.

Here are some practical suggestions:

- If you have children to look after, you could set aside some time to read the bible with them before they go to sleep.
- You could get yourself involved with the men's or women's online bible reading plan.
- You could listen to podcasts of the bible on the way to work
- Or you could make it a priority to spend some time reading and reflecting on God's word each day – even if it means waking up a little earlier in the mornings to read the bible.
- In our hectic lives we spend too much time doing, and too little time listening!
- If you feel that you have been too preoccupied with the things of the world, and you feel that the Lord seems to be distant from you... then you need to come back to the Word of God.
- We need to cultivate more of Mary's worshipful, listening spirit and less of Martha's scrambling commotion. We need to be able to shut everything out and focus our attention on God.
- It is a fundamental priority for every bible-believing Christian to seize every opportunity that is presented to us by Jesus, to sit at His feet and listen to the Word of God. – eagerly, readily, and patiently.