

## 64. Prioritizing our life

February 5, 2017

One of many blessings from the Lord for me is time management. Somehow He blessed me to know how to prioritize my tasks and make the best of the limited time I have. Of course, there are many things I don't get to do and have to postpone because of not enough time or they are less important than other things.

But I do two things at the beginning of my day – my daily devotion in the Word of God and prayer. Do I have grandiose devotional time with my Lord everyday like Dr. Billy Graham would have? No. But I don't have to compare myself to him. I am not in competition with anyone, but I am in the battle against two enemies who do their best to sidetrack me – the devil and my carnal desires. They would do anything and everything to stop me from spending time with my God.

Does it mean that I've never skipped my daily devotion and prayer? I wish I could say, "Never!", but I've skipped a few times. When I skip them, I feel so defeated at the end of the day. But if I put the Lord in my highest priority at the beginning, He helps me get the things done a lot better. Whatever I don't get done, I don't sweat over them. God willing, I will have the next day to do them. But if I kick the bucket overnight, the Lord will send someone who is far more capable than me to get it done.

Your and my lives are filled with "shoulds," "oughts," and "musts." They demand us to give our full attention immediately no matter what time of day. These "get-it-done-now" hit us like strong gusts of wind, driving our lives onto deep valley of frustration, and even despair.

This morning we are going to visit two sisters, Martha and Mary, who lived in Bethany which is located less than 2 miles from Jerusalem. Martha, the older one is a type of person who gets things done. Just let her know what needs to be done and get out of her way – from start to finish, she will put her heart into it and finish everything in perfect order. Many of you ladies and gentlemen can relate to her. But Mary is different. She is the type who puts her spiritual thing before physical ones. Let's learn to prioritize our lives in Jesus' way.

### A. DISTRACTED FROM THE LORD

*Luke 10:38-40 Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."*

How would you like to have Jesus stop by your home for lunch today? I know some of you will say, "Ah, no. Not on Super Bowl Sunday." Let's say today is any other mundane Sunday.

A gentle knock on the door, you open it and there He is with a big smile. He says, "Hi, I am hungry. May I have lunch at your home?" Immediately, we will have two types of people – one group like Martha, putting your body and mind into high gear, picking up stuff from the couch and the floor, and opening the refrigerator to see what kind of best meal you can possibly cook up for your Savior and start cooking

the most gourmet meal of the century; the other group like Mary, kicking your baby's poopy diaper under the couch, tossing a handful of taquitos from Costco into the microwave oven and bringing out chips and salsa and soda pop for Him. Jesus doesn't worry about weight gain. You are just excited to see Him and want to hear from Him.

With that in mind, let's go back to the original visit of Jesus to the home of Martha and Mary. It was a lovely scene. Allow me to describe it. Jesus and His disciples dropped by, unexpectedly, for a brief visit at His friends' home for a meal and rest which was a rare treat. This was the place where there were no enemies who constantly were looking for any flaws and misstatements.

For Mary, this was a great privilege and honor to have the Lord at her home and to listen to Him without standing outside of the house like she had to, if this was someone else's home. She brought out a basin of water to wash Jesus' feet. As Mary finished it, she laid aside the basin of water and the washrag. She sat at His feet.

3 times we see Mary in Scripture and that is where she is, at the Savior's feet – on the occasion of this visit, at the death of her brother Lazarus, and when she anointed Jesus' feet with perfume shortly before His death. Her physical posture reflected the posture of her heart – humble, reverent, and teachable. She was listening to His words attentively.

Because she was at His feet and paying attention to His Word, she could anoint Jesus with the oil of spikenard for His burial while His disciples had no idea about His death and burial even though they were told many times.

But for Martha? She was neither sitting down, nor taking anything in. She was so eager to serve. Energetic. First to roll up her sleeves and pitch in to help and the last to leave until every dish is cleaned and put away. Her meal for guests is never overcooked and everything matches. The perfect hostess. That's Martha.

But she was under a great deal of stress now. She was busy whipping out Jesus' favorite dish; she had to match placemats, napkins, silverware, and plates. In her mind, her Lord Jesus shouldn't have anything less than perfect. She already put enchiladas and chile rellanos in the oven. "Jesus likes spicy foods," Martha mumbled while she was wiping her forehead sweat with her apron. She was remembering that those disciples were bottomless when it comes to foods. She was making sure that Jesus gets to have enough food. Nothing like a hot, home-cooked meal for a weary traveler.

While Mary was listening to what Jesus wanted both ladies to hear, Martha was hearing less and less, because she was caught up in a whirlwind of activity in her kitchen. She didn't get the main point of Jesus' visit. He didn't care to have a seven course meal, rather a simple meal and fellowship with friends.

As Martha whisked the flour, salt, and baking powder together in a mixing bowl, she reheated a large skillet over medium-high heat. Then, she thought, "Where is Mary? If she was here and is helping me, we could get this done in half the time." Martha rolled a dough ball into a thin, round tortilla a little more forcefully than usual. "I cannot believe that Jesus just let her sit there while I am here working all alone this hard." Finally, she's had enough. She threw down the roll pin and stomped into the

living room. She put both of her floured fists on each side of her hips and blurted out, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."

We read that Martha was "distracted." Instead of relaxing and enjoying the Lord's presence, Martha was in a mild frenzy over all her preparations. She assumed the Lord Jesus didn't care; she blamed Mary for being irresponsible; She tried to work things out her way. What Martha intended was commendable. She wanted to serve the Lord. But the idea of serving the Lord overtook the presence of the Lord.

It is interesting that anxiety-prone people frequently blame others for their situation. Rather than realizing their stress is self-appointed, they often criticize others for causing it.

## **B. ONE THING IS NEEDED**

*Luke 10:41-42 And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."*

Can you hear and see Jesus with a gentle smile and say, "Marthaaa... Martha!" Not rebuking, but redirecting her attention to the main point of His visit. Jesus quickly analyzed her stress in two words – "worried" and "troubled," because He could see her heart.

The root verb of "worried" in Greek means "to divide into parts." Martha was pulled apart from within, because she chose to do so many things. A classic case of a stress fracture! The original Greek word for "troubled" is "thorybazo." It also means "disturbed." In other words, Martha was torn apart because of her self-imposed duty and her heart was disturbed in turmoil. The importance of being in the presence of Jesus often gets replaced by the urgency of serving Him.

Everyone has their "one thing" in life, whether they are believers or nonbelievers. It's the one thing that makes their blood pump, the thing that gets them up in the morning, the thing they are passionate about.

King David told us about his "one thing" in Psalm 27:

*Psalm 27:4 One thing I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord, And to inquire in His temple.*

We can get involved in ministries so much that we can forget why we are ministering and to whom. We can easily lose our focus from the main point of our ministry – Jesus – by neglecting time with Him in our daily devotion. We need to sit at Jesus' feet and be with Him DAILY, not just once a week on Sunday.

The key is to have the right priorities: Jesus Christ first, then others, then ourselves last.

The most important part of the Christian life is the part that only God sees. Unless we meet Christ personally and privately each day, we will soon end up like Martha: busy and distracted.

Speaking of "one thing", let me sidetrack for a few minutes. Some of you have a tendency to do things a little overboard for that "one thing" – going too far, cutting back

too much, pushing too fast, and trying too hard. Please note that not everyone has the same “one thing” like you. You can drive others crazy and you can lose your patience with them. Relax and keep everything in balance.

This is a good time to pause and evaluate your intensity. Have you become “worried and troubled” about too many things – or are you staying calm and realistic? If your intensity level is too high, back off; you’ll be a lot happier. Furthermore, you’ll be a lot easier to live with.

Long ago when my family was attending Calvary Chapel in Tucson, my wife Karen organized a Thanksgiving meal for those families who didn’t have a place to go. Everyone enjoyed and we even had a time of worship. At the end of the party, everyone was pitching in to clean up the place. But a young man who led the worship decided that he’d rather play his guitar than helping others. That young man didn’t want to work, because he thought that he didn’t have to since he led the worship.

When the devil cannot stop a godly person, he will help that godly person be busy working for the Lord so much that the person would neglect one’s relationship with the Lord.

Listen, true worship of our God will produce work for Him, but work should never take the place of worship. If you are really in fellowship and communion with God, you will want to do things that please Him. Mary seized the moment and sat at His feet.

There is a time to work, and there is a time to worship. There is a time to be active for the Lord, and there is a time to sit at His feet.

### **C. WHICH ONE ARE YOU?**

This story shows us three types of Christians:

#### **1) People like Mary**

Those who know how to serve and also sit at Jesus’ feet.

#### **2) People like Martha**

Those who diligently, and with the best intention serve God, but without adding the one very important thing – focusing on Jesus – and it results in great frustration.

#### **3) People who aren’t doing either**

These people do not spend time with Jesus, nor serve Him, because they are too busy with their own pursuits. They expect others to do the work and serve them. It is no wonder why they don’t grow spiritually. They are never-changing spiritual immature babies.