

Devotional Reading #4

Luke 10:38 Now as they were traveling along, Jesus entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; ⁴² but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

In this passage, Jesus defends and commends Mary for taking time out of her busy life to listen to His words. He also lovingly informs Martha that she would be in better shape if she followed Mary's example. This passage contains a valuable warning for us: *If we don't sit like Mary, we will serve like Martha.*

Martha is a good example in several ways. She took the initiative to invite Jesus into her home. She practiced hospitality by preparing a meal for Jesus and His disciples. In John 11, when Jesus visited after her brother Lazarus' death, Martha took the initiative to speak with Jesus before her sister Mary and confessed her faith in Jesus as the Messiah. She also followed Him to Lazarus' tomb and witnessed Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Martha is an active follower of Jesus, and we would do well to follow her example – with one exception.

Martha let her commendable service distract her from a more important opportunity – to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His words. The result was something that many active believers know by personal experience: She became "worried and bothered." Her service undoubtedly started out as an expression of love to Jesus, but it became



tainted by anxious frustration – both toward her sister Mary for not helping her, and toward Jesus for not telling Mary to help!

When our service for Jesus becomes tainted by frustration, self-pity, and a critical spirit toward our brothers and sisters, we would do well to follow Jesus' 3-fold instruction to Martha:

- “*Only one thing is necessary.*” Listening to Jesus' word is the one great essential for His servants. There are many good things that go into serving Jesus – reaching out to those who don't yet know Him, opening our homes to host others, being generous with our money, helping our brothers and sisters to mature in their faith, the list goes on and on. But even these good things become the enemy of the best if we allow our service to distract us from regularly sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to His word. This is where we receive love and vitality and encouragement and guidance which will make our service effective. Because Mary sat at Jesus' feet, she was able to serve Him in a unique way at the proper time (see John 12:1-8).
- “*Mary has chosen the good part.*” “Good” is the Greek word *agathos*, which Jesus uses here in a superlative sense – *the best part*. Serving Jesus sometimes brings its own reward of experiencing God's power and seeing people change. But no service, no matter how exciting, is more satisfying than communing with Jesus by listening to His word. David said that God's words are “more desirable than much fine gold, and sweeter than honey” (Ps. 19:10). To learn about His great love for us, to receive insight into who we are, to learn about the kingdom He is preparing for us – these and many other things in God's word are the supreme privilege and delight of our lives.
- “. . . *which will not be taken from her.*” Listening to Jesus' word has a uniquely lasting impact. Many other things that we



value and cling on to in this life – things such as our beauty, our physical health, our possessions, and our family members – will be taken away from us, either during our lifetimes or certainly at our deaths. As Isaiah said, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8). Only God’s Word sticks with us throughout the day. Only God’s word ignites an eternal ripple-effect in our lives by showing us the way into His eternal kingdom, and by shaping our souls into eternal Christlikeness.

Lord, thank You that I can serve You by serving others. Thank You that when I become distracted by my service and frustrated with the people I serve, You gently remind me to come sit at Your feet and listen to Your word. Help me to prioritize this most precious of opportunities so my service is truly effective.

