

## Luke 10:38-42

### Introduction

For the last three weeks, we've been on the road with Jesus. He's making his way from Galilee up to Jerusalem and his death on a cross. And for his disciples, it's an extended training course. They're learning what it means to follow him as those who will inherit eternal life in the kingdom of God. They're learning about discipleship.

The journey will take about a year, and we've already heard Jesus say that the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Wherever he goes, he and his disciples are dependent on the hospitality of others. As they go from town to town proclaiming the kingdom of God, sometimes they're welcomed. Sometimes they're not. And Martha, who we meet this morning, is among those who welcome him. She receives Jesus into her home and extends hospitality to him. It's a well-known story. But the issue it raises is the kind of hospitality that Jesus seeks. What kind of welcome is he looking for?

This passage teaches four things that we must grasp if we're to welcome Jesus as he desires. Here are four things you and I must do. Firstly, focus on yourself. Secondly, check your attitude. Thirdly, don't get distracted. Fourthly and most importantly, listen to what Jesus says.

Here then is the first thing you and I must do if we're to welcome Jesus as he wants: focus on yourself. You might be surprised to hear me say that. It may not be what you were expecting to hear this morning. But let me show you what I mean.

### Focus on yourself

Please look at verses 38 to 40 with me. They say this: **As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 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!'**

Martha has opened her home to Jesus, and she's doing something worthy and valuable. She's providing food and refreshment to weary travellers. It's easy to imagine her rushing around her kitchen, opening drawers and cupboards, piling things onto a table, grabbing a chopping knife, and preparing a feast. She's lovely. She's the kind of lady we'd love to have in our church family. And I thank God that we've got many people in the church who are just like Martha, who open their homes and are generous with hospitality. What a blessing they are. And the practical kindness of Martha, and others like her, is part of the Christian life. Martha is doing a good thing. But it's clear that she would have appreciated a bit of help from her sister. Perhaps a bit of sibling rivalry kicks in. If you're still living at home, you

may know how that feels. You're busy helping out with household chores while your brother or sister relaxes on the sofa scrolling through their social media account. It doesn't take long for frustrations to surface. Here Martha is doing all the hard work, while her sister is sitting around doing nothing. We can almost hear her muttering under her breath, "Thanks a lot, Mary."

Perhaps Martha's frustration is understandable. And perhaps, whether you're a sibling or not, you've felt the same way at times. You're busy serving the Lord at great cost. You're giving up time and energy to do all that needs to be done at home and at church. And yet others don't appear to be playing their part. You're exhausting yourself, and they appear to be happy letting you do so. Perhaps you can sympathise with Martha. But part of Martha's problem is that she's worrying too much about what others are doing rather than her own response to Jesus. His words to her seem like a gentle rebuke. She's doing a valuable work, but she should worry less about what Mary's doing and focus on herself. And that's a lesson that you and I may need to learn. It's a lesson we need to learn as we give ourselves to serving our Lord.

Your acts of service are between you and the Lord. And the acts of service of others are between them and the Lord. Of course, there may be times when people need to be challenged about playing their part. No doubt, some could be doing more and need to be encouraged to do so. But first and foremost, we need to focus on ourselves and our own acts of service. We need to examine ourselves. Am I expressing my love for Jesus by serving him wholeheartedly? Is my love for Jesus evident in how I use my time and energy? And am I serving out of love for who he is and gratitude for all he's done, and using the gifts he's given me with joy and thankfulness?

What a difference it could make if each of us regularly spent time thinking about those kinds of questions and responding with honesty. That's the first thing this passage teaches us. Rather than worrying about what others are doing, focus on yourself. And that means, secondly, check your attitude.

### Check your attitude

Look again 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!'**

Do you notice the inconsistency in Martha's words? She calls Jesus, 'Lord'. And yet she doesn't speak to him as Lord. There's not much respect. In fact, as well as being critical of her *sister*, she seems to be rebuking *him*. '**Don't you care...**' she says. 'Has it slipped your attention that I'm the one doing all the hard work here, while Mary's just sitting there doing nothing?' She may call Jesus, 'Lord' but she doesn't speak to him as Lord. Her words are accusatory and critical. And there's no evidence of submissiveness. In fact, she tries to

recruit Jesus to her cause: **‘Tell her to help me!’** she says. She’s telling Jesus what to do. She expects him to come to her aid.

You’ve got to feel sorry for Martha. She’s run off her feet. She’s feeling overwhelmed. And she’s forgotten herself. She’s acting as though *she’s* the boss of Jesus. It’s a trap we can all fall into. Particularly when life’s busy and overwhelming, and others seem to have it better than we do. ‘Don’t you care, Lord? Don’t you see how busy I am?’ Do you ever think that? When you’re feeling overwhelmed, do you find that you can become grumpy and resentful towards the Lord? I can. And I might even start telling him what I want him to do about it, to make it better. Like anyone else, I can call Jesus, ‘Lord’ yet treat him as someone to be recruited to my cause. I can speak to him as though he’s there to serve *me* rather than the other way round. Do you find that?

Of course, we can talk to the Lord about anything. We can bring all our concerns to him. The Bible encourages us to do so. But we need to check our attitude. Jesus will not be Lord in name only. If we welcome him as Lord, then we need to treat him as Lord. And we need to treat him as Lord always, especially when the pressure’s on and we’re feeling hard done by.

The self-centredness of our sinful nature never lies far below the surface. It’s like a crocodile in a river, lurking under the surface, biding its time, waiting for an opportunity to strike. It’s the old voice that tells me that *I* am the most important person in the room, that the universe should revolve around *me*. But if we would follow Jesus, it’s an attitude that we must each repent of daily. We need to keep a close watch over ourselves. Am I treating Jesus as Lord? And am I submitting to him as my Lord? Or am I trying to be the boss of him, so that *he* serves *me* rather than the other way round?

Jesus will not be Lord in name only. Check your attitude. And thirdly, don’t get distracted.

### Don’t get distracted

Look at verse 40 again. **But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made...** And verse 41. **‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things...’**

Martha’s preoccupied with how busy she is. She’s opened her home to Jesus and welcomed him in. But the time she’s spending in the kitchen is keeping her away from him. She’s so busy doing things *for* Jesus that she hasn’t stopped to listen *to* Jesus. She’s so busy running round *after* him that she hasn’t stopped to spend time *with* him.

Imagine that a new neighbour moves in next door. You call round to visit. She welcomes you at the door and ushers you into the sitting room. Then she disappears into the kitchen. Before long, you hear the sound of the kettle boiling. You can hear cupboard doors slamming shut and occasionally you catch the odd comment: ‘Where is it?’ ‘I know it’s here

somewhere.’ Then your new neighbour rushes in and places a pot of tea and a plate of biscuits in front of you, before rushing out again, looking a bit stressed and agitated. You can hear more cupboards slamming shut. More words muttered under her breath. ‘Is everything alright?’ you ask. ‘Yes, yes,’ she says, ‘I’m just trying to find that chocolate cake.’ It’s all very nice. And you appreciate her kindness. But it’s not what you were hoping for. What you really want is for her to stop what she’s doing, to come and sit down, and to spend some time getting to know each other. That’s Martha with Jesus.

And it can be us too. When we become Christians, life is transformed. It opens up with opportunities to serve the Lord. We can serve him at home through the love we show our families. We can serve him at work through our witness and example. We can serve him in the church by getting involved in any number of ministries. We can serve him in our neighbourhoods by getting to know those around us. Life is full of good and valuable opportunities to serve the Lord. And all that busyness can be good. We can be busy doing good things. But those good things can also be a distraction. Our acts of service can keep us from the Lord we serve. We can be so busy doing things *for* him that we stop spending time *with* him.

I wonder how many times I’ve been to visit a member of the church, and they’ve told me all they’re doing: how busy they are at work, the time they’re spending with their family, the ministry they’re involved in at church, the people they’re trying to talk to about Jesus. And it’s all good. But when I ask them how their quiet times of reading the Bible and speaking with the Lord are going, they look embarrassed and tell me that they’re not really happening at all. Life is just too busy. We’re all like Martha. We so easily let our busyness keep us from the Lord. But if you would follow Jesus, don’t let anything stop you from spending time with him each day. That’s not because it’s another box to be ticked, another thing to add to your busy to-do list, but because a relationship is at stake. If something is stopping you, then ask yourself what needs to change. Don’t get distracted. And fourthly and finally, listen to what Jesus says.

### Listen to what Jesus says

Please look down again at verse 39. **[Martha] had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.**

And look at verse 41. **‘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.’**

Your and my relationship with the Lord depends on us spending time with him. And that happens as we spend time listening to what he says to us in his word, the Bible. That’s the better thing that Mary has chosen. She’s a model of submissiveness as she sits at the feet of Jesus. To sit at someone’s feet means to be their student. Mary is sat at the feet of Jesus,

listening to everything he says, because she wants to learn from him. It's what Martha should have done first, before worrying about food. And that, quite simply, is the hospitality that Jesus seeks. He seeks men and women who will sit at his feet and learn from him before doing anything else. That's what it means to welcome him.

That isn't to say that the Christian life is one of inactivity. Service is an important part of the Christian life. But the service the Lord desires is the service that arises from listening to him.

Despite all our busyness, you and I will achieve nothing of lasting value if we haven't first spent time listening to Jesus and learning from him. Before we do anything, we need to let him teach us about God's values and priorities, about what God likes and dislikes, about God's eternal purpose for his people and his world. We need to use all the means available to us to listen to him: daily Bible reading, home groups, coming to church, perhaps even listening to Christian music.

It's all too easy to spend our days running around, worried and upset about many things, overwhelmed with all that needs to be done. There's always lots to be done. But what is most necessary is to invest our time in listening to Jesus. As with every relationship, our relationship with Jesus depends on spending time with him. And that is the best way to use our time. See what Jesus says to Martha at the end of verse 42. **'Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'** To invest in nurturing our relationship with Jesus is to invest in what will last for all eternity. It will never be taken away from us. It will be the cause of our ultimate joy and happiness both in this life and forevermore.

## Conclusion

So then, this encounter with Martha and Mary is foundational to Christian discipleship. It contains four basic lessons that we all need to learn, if we're to extend the welcome to Jesus he desires. Focus on yourself. Before you start worrying about what other people are doing, focus on your own response to Jesus. Check your attitude. If you call Jesus, 'Lord,' then relate to him as Lord. Don't get distracted. Don't let anything stop you from spending time with him each day. And listen to what Jesus says. The life he wants you to live starts with listening to him. It means investing in a relationship which will last for all eternity.

This is how to receive him and welcome him.

Let's pray.

Loving Father, please help each of us here to welcome Jesus and learn from him. Please keep us from being distracted by the busyness of life and help us to spend time with him, nurturing that relationship which will last for all eternity. And as we do, please would our lives overflow with the good fruit that comes from knowing him. In his name we pray. Amen.