

In a couple months, I'll be moving to Paraguay. I haven't started to pack my things yet. But it's been on my mind. And I'm starting to realize that the process of packing for Paraguay is going to be a lesson in priorities.

See, I can't bring down everything I own. Shipping stuff to South America isn't cheap. And I'll be flying, and the airline will only allow so much size and weight for my luggage. So I've gotta go through all the stuff in my house and office and think: What do I need most? Of all the books on my shelf, which ones are most important? Of all the clothes in my closet, which will I most need? The last thing I want is to get to my new home only to realize that, of all the good and necessary things I brought with me, I left the *best* and *most* necessary behind.

Our Savior helps us all do a similar prioritizing this morning. Not with our stuff; with our schedules. Like limited luggage space, we all have limited time – 24 hours in a day, 7 days in a week. And we fill that time with activities – sometimes there's even more to do than there is time to do it! But it can happen so easily that, as we fill our days with good and necessary activities, we leave out the *best* and *most* needed.

It happened to a woman named Martha. So this morning, let's follow Jesus into her home and learn from him the same loving lesson he taught her: "Only one thing is needed..." Jesus says to us this morning. That's 1) a necessary reminder, but it's also 2) a gracious invitation.

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 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!"

⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

I. A necessary reminder

I think we can all sympathize with Martha here. If Jesus stopped by at your place after church, I think your house would be a flurry of activity, too. You'd be at work in the kitchen preparing the best meal you could; setting the table with the finest flatware; whatever you could to make sure Jesus was comfortable and the house stayed clean. And you'd be doing all that for the same reason Martha did: Because he's Jesus. He's your Savior. You love him more than the world.

The house was a flurry of activity...except where Jesus and Martha's sister Mary were. If the house was a hurricane, Jesus and Mary were in the eye. There, things were quiet and still. Jesus spoke. Mary sat listening attentively, seemingly oblivious to everything but Jesus' words.

Do you think Martha wanted to sit and listen to Jesus, too? I think she did. I think that was probably why she invited Jesus over in the first place. But Luke says she was **distracted** – her heart tugged away by all the other **preparations**, all the things that needed doing! And Mary wasn't lifting a finger to help. And Jesus was letting her just sit there. And her frustration builds up until it spills out: "**Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!**"

I think it's easy to sympathize with Martha. Because she's a lot like us. She loved her Savior; you do, too. She was busy with a lot of good things – busy serving her Savior. And so are you! Whether it's your responsibilities at work, or taking care of your kids, or babysitting your grandkids, or keeping up the house...as Christians, when you carry out those callings God has given you, you're really serving your Savior. Even vacation, relaxation, is a good, necessary God-pleasing thing.

And Martha knew time spent at Jesus feet was a good thing. She wanted to hear his Word. You do, too, don't you? You could have slept in or gone out for brunch this morning; instead, you came here to sit at Jesus' feet. Because you know it's a good and necessary thing!

But Martha's sin – our sin – is this: We consider time at Jesus' feet *a* good thing. But we don't always see it as *the better* thing. A necessary thing, but we don't always treat it as *the most needed* thing. Like Martha, we let other good things pull us away from what Jesus calls the one thing needed.

How do you see that happening in your life? It happened to me this past week. Vicar and I have been doing devotions together every morning. Last week, we had our youth soccer camp. And in all the good things we had to do to get ready for that camp, we only had – what – two devotions last week? We neglected the one thing needed.

How do you see that happening in your life? Maybe like us you see it in your personal devotion life – or lack thereof? Not taking time at home, for you and your family, meditating on God's Word. Or instead of being the one iron-clad thing in your schedule, it gets cut when life gets crazy – when you need it most.

Maybe you see it in your worship life. You're here some Sundays, but other Sundays you're not. Or you regularly pass up bible study after worship – because some other Sunday activity is more important to you than time spent in God's Word. Maybe it happens while you're in God's house: You're Mary on the outside, sitting at Jesus' feet, but Martha on the inside – heart distracted from his words by your worries or what's on your weekly to-do list.

Martha, Martha... Jesus said to her. And he could well say our names there too, couldn't he? It's so easy to live distracted. So we all need the reminder: **“You are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but only one thing is needed.”** It might seem like he's exaggerating at first, but he's not. It really is the only thing needed, when you think about your eternity, your salvation. Nothing else on your daily schedule will help with that. What you need to get into heaven – faith in Jesus as your Savior – only Jesus gives it, and only through his Word. It's not just a good thing among many. It's the one thing we need above all else.

So you hear Jesus' love in the reminder, don't you? Martha said to Jesus: **“Lord, don't you care...?”** And it's so clear from Jesus' words that he does. He cares most about what matters most: Her eternal well-being. You can hear how much he loves her as he says it: “Martha, Martha.”

And since you can fill in your name there, hear his love for you, too. Jesus cares most about what matters most for you: Your eternal well-being. You hear it in this necessary reminder that his Word is the one thing needed. But you see it in the first words of our lesson, too: **As Jesus and his disciples were on their way...** Do you know where Jesus was heading with his disciples? Luke tells us last chapter he's heading to Jerusalem. He's heading to the cross, where you see just how much your eternal well-being mattered to Jesus. Where he died to pay for all of Martha's messed up priorities and ours. Where he died under the punishment you deserved to win you what you needed most: Forgiveness for all of your sins, life with him that lasts forever in heaven.

II. *A gracious invitation*

When you remember that this is the Jesus who says it – **one thing is needed** – well, then you realize the words aren't just a needed reminder. He's extending a gracious invitation.

See, Martha thought that she was the host that day. Jesus was her guest, and she needed to serve him. But Jesus is saying that she had it backwards. He hadn't come to be served by her, but first and foremost, to serve her. He was the host! And Mary recognized that. She wasn't lazy or unloving. She just knew that what Jesus wanted to do for her through his word was so much more important than what she could do for Jesus right then. That he'd come to spread a banquet of blessings for their souls.

Martha needed that. Did you notice how her soul was faring? According to Jesus, she was **worried and upset about many things**. Jesus was inviting her to take a seat beside Mary and find rest and peace in his words.

He invites you to the same. Our busy lives leave our souls **worried and upset about many things**. But in his word, Jesus is the gracious host who spreads a banquet for our souls. He gives you peace in the knowledge of sins forgiven. Rest in all he has done to save you and is doing for you. Quiets your troubles with his love, takes away your worries by assuring you of how busy he is ruling all things for your eternal good.

But he also serves you to prepare you for what's coming. Mary and Martha didn't know it at the time. But not long after Jesus' visit to their home, they were going to watch their brother Lazarus fall ill. They were going to be praying at his bedside and waiting for Jesus to come and help...only to watch Lazarus die while he was en route. It was a painful trial that would test their trust in Jesus. Do you think maybe that's why Jesus accepted this invitation at this time? Because he knew what was coming...and wanted to strengthen this family's faith for the hardship ahead?

Do you think that Jesus wants to do the same for you? We don't know what the days and months ahead will bring us. It could be a painful trial like theirs - a sickness or a death. It could be a new temptation that's thrown our way. We don't know what's coming...but Jesus does. And his invitation, his promise, is this: Through his word, he prepares us for what's coming. In his word, he serves you just the strength, comfort, reassurance that your soul needs...to keep you trusting in him until he brings you to heaven.

It's incredible, isn't it? In his word, the Lord of the Universe wraps a towel around his waist. He's the host, and you're the guest of honor, and he sets before you the finest of fare for your soul – everything he died to win for you, and now gives you as a gift. And it's just for you – just what you need, personally.

Take him up on the invitation. Come sit at Jesus' feet in worship, bible studies, personal devotions. Choose the one thing needed. It's the better thing, and like Mary, it will not be taken from you. Amen.