

Hospitality "Sweet"?
[based on Luke 10:38-42]

Trouble! This story of Mary and Martha always seems to spell trouble, doesn't it? Whenever I have preached on this passage of the Bible, a number of people will say to me, "I think Martha was right. I mean you can't just ignore all those things that needed to be done - can you?" I have even heard a person say, "I don't think Jesus was very fair to Martha - do you?"

From such feedback I conclude that there are many of us who have been left with all the "dirty" work. You know what I'm talking about, don't you? You are out at the bar-b-que, cooking hamburgers for your company. It's hot out there and the flies are buzzing around.

Everyone else is doing all their favourite pastimes - swimming in the pool, watching the game, playing sports or board games, or just talking to each other... and here you are, stuck doing all the work. You think, "Come on guys, would it hurt for **somebody** to come out here and give me a hand?"

Life just doesn't seem fair. The dirty work is never fun, and that is exactly the predicament between our biblical siblings, Mary and Martha.

Martha was doing her best to provide for all the guests, the most honoured one being Jesus, and she should be commended for it. She is a very good worker bee and I am sure she wanted to make it a very special event for the Master. She wanted to give him her best.

But something negative happens in the story. Rather than being a "happy" occasion, it turns into a frustrating occasion for Martha. Let's look again at verse 40: "Martha was busy doing all the work that had to be done."

Does this mean that Martha is so busy serving Jesus that she wasn't paying attention to Him? Was her attention really distracted from the one thing that was most important?

You know that Jesus taught: "People cannot live by bread alone but by every word of God that proceeds from his mouth." Matthew 4:4

It has been said that it is better to go hungry than to go wrong.

I think our frenetic generation needs to hear this teaching. Often, we place a value on ourselves based on how busy we are.

We rush here, and we rush there, and when we meet others, we talk about how much we have to do and how little time we have to do it in. We have a frantic life, rather than a focused life. We are like Martha when Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things."

Perhaps the best thing we could do is stop rushing and start resting in Jesus. Stop moving and start meditating. We need to stop worrying about "so many things" and refocus on those things that are really important.

You see it is very easy to get out of focus. There are several things that happen when we get our lives out of focus - at least that's what happened to Martha.

Loss of focus causes us to question God's care.

Looking at the remainder of verse 40, notice the first thing that Martha says to Jesus: "Lord, do You not care?" There seems to be accusation in her voice. "Lord are you not paying attention to what is going on here? Lord, don't you see all the work that I'm doing? Lord come on, do something. Don't you care about me?"

Martha was angry at Jesus because He continued to let the situation go on and on, and she addressed her irritation at Jesus. You have to admit that she is one gutsy woman! She is accusing Jesus of not caring for her. Martha was sure that if Jesus really cared for her, He would level the playing field.

Have you ever accused God of not caring for you? Have you ever questioned where He is when you are going through times of trouble? You know that God could fix a particular situation, yet He seems to sit in silence. Doesn't God care for me? Is He going to sit back and do nothing?

That is when we can take comfort in the scriptures. Hebrews 13:5 says, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." And Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope."

Folks, there is a great truth here - God always takes care of His children.

There may be times in your life when you want God to speak and He doesn't. Don't judge the silence as God being unconcerned for you. He knows what you are going through, and He will always watch over you.

But Martha was worried more about the biscuits than she was about the blessings. She was more concerned about her roast than she was about her relationship with Jesus. Loss of focus always confuses the issue.

Loss of focus causes us to begin finding fault with others.

In the second part of verse forty, Martha finally explodes with anger and she comes out of the kitchen boiling mad. She says: "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work alone? Tell her to help me."

Martha doesn't even call her sister by name. She is mad at the world and those who are close to her should know it. "How can Mary just leave me out here to fend for myself? Can't even my sister come and help me? Can't she see what is going on? Who does she think she is just sitting there doing nothing?"

Have you ever been around people who, when they get mad, make you want to flee the neighborhood? The explosion may not kill you, but the shrapnel will. There are people who, when they get mad, become mad at the whole world. They take their frustration out on everything and everyone.

Here is some wisdom from James 1 on anger: "Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."

Friends, if you get angry all the time, pay attention to what you are focusing on. If your focus is on **your** situation rather than Jesus, perhaps you need to refocus.

Loss of focus causes us to resort to self-pity.

Do you know what all this boils down to? Martha felt that she wasn't being treated fairly, so she evolved into a world of self pity.

Once again we examine verse 40: "Martha was distracted with all her preparations." The sense of the word "distracted" means "to be pulled away" or to be "dragged away", in other words - to be taken captive, to be made a prisoner against one's own free will.

The implication is that Martha wanted to hear Jesus herself. She wanted to be seated at His feet too, next to Mary, but her sense of duty pulled her away – took her captive. Fretting about the meal had robbed her of the joy of listening to the Lord.

We should, of course, take our daily responsibilities seriously, but not to the point where we neglect listening to Jesus.

Martha wanted to listen to Him because He offers words of abundant life ... "the first shall be last and the last first" ... "I am the bread of life, he who eats of this bread will live forever"... "pray for your enemies and bless those who curse you".

But she could not listen to Him, for her mind had been taken captive by "many things".

And so, Jesus says to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary - focus on me."

There is a Scottish legend about a poor boy who was tending some sheep on a mountain side. The boy saw a beautiful flower at his feet so he picked it. As he picked it, he heard a great sound. Looking up he saw, in the side of the mountain before him, a cave.

Within the cave were precious gems and minerals. He walked into the cave - laid down the flower and began to gather up gold, silver, and precious gems. He held them in his arms. When his arms were full, he heard a voice speaking to him and it said, "Don't forget the best."

So, the boy turned again and gathered even more stuff into his arms getting a larger load than last time. As he was about to leave the cave, he heard the voice say again "Don't forget the best."

This time the boy laid everything down and filled his pockets. He hooked things on to his belt and reached out and gathered everything he could possibly carry. Having a full load, the boy left the cave, and at that instant, the cave closed behind him, locking him out.

In the wink of an eye, all the boy had gathered up, was gone. And then the voice said, "You forgot the best. The flower that you left behind is the key to the treasure...it opened the door for you. Always select the best and you can have the rest."

Friends, Jesus is the key - select the best. Build your relationship with Jesus and you will have the rest.

We can become so busy with, and distracted by, the "things" of life, that the chaos blocks out Jesus.

My friends...

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in his wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim.
In the light of his glory and grace.”
AMEN