**What Is Better**

Luke 10:38-42

Key Verse 42

“But few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

**Introduction**

Today’s passage is a unique story found only in Luke’s gospel. Although it is a short passage, Jesus helps us to learn the value of choosing ‘what is better’. The stark contrast between Mary and Martha’s response to Jesus’ arrival shows us the blessed way of having a relationship with Jesus and how to serve him properly. Martha was busy preparing things to serve Jesus, while Mary sat at Jesus’ feet to hear his words. Martha became upset as she was working all by herself and complained about Mary. But Jesus said, “Mary has chosen what is better” May the Lord help us to understand the reason why Jesus said this and to choose what is better.

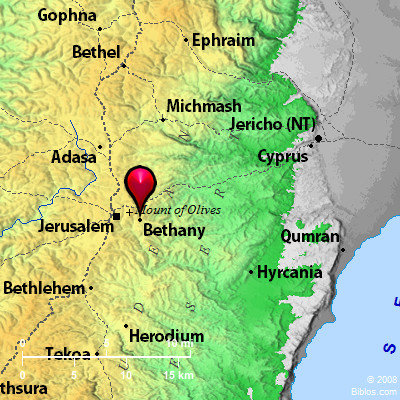
1. **Read verses 38-39. Where did Jesus and his disciples arrive? (38) What can we learn from Martha who opened her home to Jesus? What did Mary do? (39) What does this show about her?**

1-1.Read verses 38-39.

**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.

1-2 Where did Jesus and his disciples arrive? (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.



- The town was Bethany (John 11:1), located 3km away from Jerusalem to the east.

- We learned from the previous passage (Luke 9:51) that Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

- Now Jesus is almost in Jerusalem and will go through suffering and death on the cross.

- Martha had one sister and one brother: Mary and Lazarus.

- Lazarus was dead but raised by Jesus(John 11:1-44) and Mary poured expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet later ( John 12:1-2)

- Jesus and Martha’s family had an intimate relationship and Jesus loved them so much.

- When Jesus came to Jerusalem, he and his disciples visited her family and stayed in their house.

- ‘Martha’ means ‘hostess’

1-3. What can we learn from Martha who opened her home to Jesus?

***Martha opened her home to him.***

- It shows her hospitality toward Jesus in that she first opened her heart toward Jesus and welcomed him into her house.

- She served Jesus by offering what Jesus and his disciples needed practically.

- It is not easy to invite many guests to our home, but she was willing to do so.

- It is by serving Jesus and his disciples that she contributed herself to God’s work.

- Martha was a woman of action. We can learn from her passion and zeal to serve Jesus.

- Like Martha, there were many women who supported Jesus’ ministry(Luke 8:3)

Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

- Thankfully there are many servants in the church taking care of practical things such as preparing the environment and cleaning the church.

- Due to their precious hands of service many church events are being implemented.

- There are also many believers who open their homes to their bible students and coworkers to serve them. In this way they are serving Jesus and his ministry.

Matthew 10:42 reads,

And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

1-4. What did Mary do? (39)

***Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.***

* We can see the two sisters who had different characters. Both of them loved Jesus so dearly and were loved by Jesus as well.
* Martha was active, stirring, and impulsive. She was emotionally driven and passionate about speaking out whatever came to her mind. On the other hand, Mary was quiet, still, and a profound thinker who spoke much less than her sister.
* We can learn that all believers have different characters and styles.
* We cannot expect all believers to be exactly like one another.
* All believers are loved by God and led by the same Spirit and share a common interest to serve Jesus.
* However, we differ. There will be always Martha like people and Mary like people in the church.

1-5. What does this show about her?

- Mary was interested in listening to Jesus’ word instead of helping Martha.

- When Jesus came to their home, the first thing Mary wanted to do was to listen to his word.

- She loved Jesus’ word. She sat at the nearest spot, that is, at Jesus’ feet. She had an eager desire to listen to the word of God.

- In the relationship with Jesus, her main focus was to listen to his word.

- Jesus honored Mary’s eager desire to listen to his word later by saying “Mary has chosen what is better”

- Mary was so called a woman under Jesus’ feet’ because she listened to Jesus’ word at his feet.

- In that culture, as in many parts of the world to this day, houses were divided into male ‘space’ and female ‘space,’ and male and female roles were strictly demarcated.

- That being said, Mary had crossed an invisible but very important boundary within the house.

- The public room was where the men would meet each other; the kitchen, and other quarters unseen by outsiders, belonged to the women.

- So in that culture only a shameless woman would behave in such a way. She should go back into the women’s quarters where she was supposed to belong.

* Also to sit at the feet of a teacher was considered to be a male role in those days. Sitting at someone’s feet doesn’t necessarily mean a devoted posture.
* Saul of Tarsus sat at the feet of Gamaliel(Acts 22:3, ‘under’ means at the feet of)
* Saul used to listening and learning, focusing the teaching of his master and putting it together in his mind.
* So to sit at the feet of a rabbi meant to be their student.
* Also to sit at the feet of a rabbi meant that you wanted to be a rabbi.
* So logically Mary must have had a revolutionary thought or taken a bold step that she had quietly taken her place to become a teacher or a preacher of the kingdom of God. Who knows?
* However it has nothing to with the modern day women’s movement.
* No doubt there were many women who became Jesus’ disciples.
* For instance, Mary Magdalene and Mary must have become influential disciples of Jesus.
* Mary has a tendency to sit/fell at Jesus’ feet. When she pleaded Jesus to save his brother at his feet and poured perfume on Jesus’ feet.

John 11:32 reads,

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

John 12:1-3 read,

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. **2** Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. **3** Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

**2. Read verse 40. What troubled Martha? (40a) What were her complaints and what did she want Jesus to do? (40b) What does this reveal about her?**

2-1. Read 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!”

2-2. What troubled Martha? (40a)

***“But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made”***

* Martha was distracted and troubled by doing much preparation work to serve Jesus and his disciples.
* Jesus said she was “worried and upset” with many things. It was the problem!
* She might have had good intention to serve Jesus and His companion.
* We need Martha like people. Her only problem was the fact that she lost Jesus in the middle of her busy prep and was distracted.
* She ended up being upset and irritated due to her sister who did not help her. She must have called her several times for help. But she did not respond.
* Finally she was not able to tolerate with her indifference.

- She couldn’t focus on Jesus’ word. She might want to listen to Jesus too but she thought that preparing things to serve Jesus was more important.

- We can understand that the work had to be done. But the issue here was that she was not supposed to be worried or upset.

- Her great zeal to serve Jesus made her forget the things for her soul.

- She thought that she had to provide something to Jesus.

- But Jesus didn’t come to their home just to be served. Actually he came to their home to serve them with life giving words.

- As Jesus went up to Jerusalem, especially about 10 or 15 minutes away from there, he left behind him towns, villages, households and individuals in order to take his cross to save all mankinds from their sin and eternal condemnation.

- So at this important momentum, Martha and Mary should pay attention to Jesus himself and Jesus’ words of grace and salvation.

- And then their lives would never be the same after they heard Jesus’ life giving message!

- However unfortunately Martha only thought about what she needed to do to serve Jesus but didn’t think about what she needed the most.

- When she was busy minded, she couldn’t think about what Jesus wanted to give her.

- Likewise if we just focus on working to serve Jesus with our own zeal and strength, we will often times be distracted, burn out, and get upset.

- We should first figure out what Jesus wants us to do and then we can serve him without trouble.

2-3. What were her complaints and what did she want Jesus to do? (40b)

***“She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me”***

- She was upset with her sister since she didn’t help her.

- She thought that Mary was wrong. She criticized her by saying that she was doing only what she liked and ignoring her duties.

- She might think that Mary was very selfish.

- She was upset with Jesus too for Jesus seemed to not care about her situation.

- She thought that she was doing the right thing for the situation.

- Her heart was filled with complaints.

- God doesn’t want us to serve him with this kind of condition. God is not pleased with this kind of service.

- In the same way no one would be happy when someone serves him or her with unhappy feeling.

- God wants us to serve him with great joy and thankful heart instead.

- Therefore we needed Jesus’ word to have meaning first.

- Only those who are served first by Jesus can serve him with great joy .

2-4. What does this reveal about her?

* She was doing things according to her own judgment instead of considering what Jesus wanted.
* She was confident what she was doing was right. She must have been self-righteous at that moment.

**3. Read verses 41-42. What did Jesus tell Martha? What was needed for her the most? How did he see what Mary chose to do? (42b) What can we learn from Jesus’ admonition?**

3-1. Read verses 41-42.

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

3-2. What did Jesus tell Martha?

**41** “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, **42** but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

3-3. What was needed for her the most?

***“You are worried and upset about many things”***

- Being worried and upset is not the status of our mind that God desires. Rather God wants us to have peace and joy in our mind.

Romans 14:17-18 read,

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, **18** because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

- The more we are involved in, the more we might be worried.

- We could be worried about many things in this world; health, money, children, property, position, honor, achievement, and prosperity. Although these are not bad, they are not supposed to make us worry.

***“But few things are needed – or indeed only one”***

- We need to think about what we really need.

- Serving is not the problem. Serving is fine. Her attitude as “distracted” by her service was the problem.

- In the middle of all the preparations, she lost Jesus. She was not happy by doing many things.

- In contrast Mary was very happy by doing nothing but sitting and listening to Jesus. Martha missed the point of Jesus’ coming.

- She did not know that Jesus came to teach the Bible to her. She did not know that Jesus really wanted to have fellowship with her.

- Jesus wanted her to listen to him and receive the words of eternal life. But Martha was distracted because she wanted to prepare a perfect meal for Jesus.

- Her distraction was turned into complaints and worries and it brought her an upset stomach.

- Instead of listening to Jesus, Martha was pushing Jesus to listen to her complaint.

- What we really need is to listen to Jesus and to appreciate the grace of salvation in and through Jesus Christ. We can know what he has done through the word of God.

- We should put the priority on listening to the word of God than any other things no matter how urgent they seemed to us.

- If we miss the word of God in order to do many other things, we end up missing all things like Martha.

- When we have the word of God, we can be truly fruitful and do God’s work successfully.

3-4. How did he see what Mary chose to do? (42b)

***“Mary has chosen what is better”***

- Jesus highly valued Mary’s choice. Jesus considered listening to the word of God to be better than just working without the word of God.

- She felt that Jesus’ teaching was more important than anything else in the whole world.

- While listening to what Jesus said, God of hope revived in her deep soul and she accepted the living hope of the kingdom of God.

- As Jesus continued to speak, his words liberated her from all kinds of worries and cares of this world.

- Literally she lost track and even forgot to prepare dinner with Martha when she listened to the word of Jesus.

- The word of truth set her free from the burdens of sin. To her, the word of Jesus was sweeter than the honey.

- Mary enjoyed the word of truth and had deeper relationship with Jesus. The word of Jesus was spiritual food to her hungry soul.

- She fixed her eyes on Jesus and the sweet word of Jesus. Heavenly sunshine touched her soul, flooding her heart.

- After listening to Jesus, Mary had done a beautiful thing to Jesus by breaking a jar of expensive perfume and pouring the perfume on his head.

- Her beautiful service followed after she experienced personal love and grace through Jesus’ word of forgiveness.

- Choosing to have the word of God turned out to be the best choice for her.

- Having Jesus’ word is to be the first thing for all people and for all situations.

***“It will not be taken away from her.”***

- The word that we receive from Jesus cannot be taken by anything. The word of God will remain in the person’s heart and bear much fruit.

- All the grace cannot be taken from the man who receives it. The grace will be with him to the end until the day of resurrection.

3-5. What can we learn from Jesus’ admonition?

* Jesus commented that she chose what is better. Then the truth is that Martha chose what is good and Mary did what is better.
* Martha chose to prepare dinner for Jesus and the disciples. It does not discourage people to prepare a lunch or a dinner.
* It is not a matter of conflicting message. Rather this is the matter of priority. Time with Jesus is more important than preparing a meal for him.
* Sometimes the activity associated with service can prevent us from hearing God’s word.
* Service of the hand can never supersede service of the ear, since the ear instructs the heart and the heart guides the hand.
* Humanly speaking, it looks like Mary is being lazy and selfish and a spoiled youngest daughter.
* But Jesus did not think so. Jesus was happy that Mary sat down to study the Bible with him.
* Here we learn that Jesus’ real intention in visiting the home of Mary and Martha was to teach the Bible to them.
* Mary was humble enough to recognize her true need. She needed Jesus’ word. She perceived Jesus’ heart’s desire to give her his word.
* Of course, Jesus and his disciples were hungry and needed a place to take rest.
* But Jesus’ real intention in visiting the house was to share the word of God with Mary and Martha.
* Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God as of first importance. In this part, we learn from Mary that what Jesus really wants us to do is to sit at his feet and listen to his word.
* Jesus visits to bless, not to burden nor upset them.
* Most of all, we learn from Jesus that he taught the Bible to one open-hearted person as of first importance.

**Conclusion**

Chapter 10 is a kind of landmark of God’s history according to a historian, Luke. Jesus who was on the way to Jerusalem, was drawing the boundary of God’s people by sending out a clear message, “The Kingdom of God is come near.” In this way he was exciting to announce the fact that the gospel message would reach to those outside the traditional borders in Israel. Also through Mary’s case at today’s passage he was redrawing the boundaries between men and women, blurring lines which had been clearly laid down so far. Likewise Jesus is in His Holy business of world mission in every possible direction. Jesus also wants us to seek one thing that we really need. The one thing is Jesus himself and his grace that he gives us through his word. Jesus visits us not to be served, but to give us his grace. When we have Jesus’ life giving word in our heart we can serve God with great joy and peace and power in and through God’s righteousness.

**One word: indeed only one!**