

Luke 10:38-42

*Worship or Work?*

They had been married for twenty years. Things had started off great, but over time it seemed they were more like roommates than husband and wife. Sometimes it was even worse. They were like two strangers living under the same roof.

Finally she talked him into going for marriage counseling. "I don't see what the problem is," he explained to the counselor. "He doesn't love me anymore," said the wife.

"I don't love you? I go to work every day so you can have a nice house, a dishwasher, furniture, and a car. How can you say I don't love you?"

"Because you never tell me," she says. "Of course I love you," he says. "I told you I loved you 20 years ago when we got married, if I change my mind, believe me, I'll let you know."

Some people in this room can laugh at a story like that. Others can't. They can't because it hits too close to home.

Marriage is about a whole lot more than just doing things, isn't it? It's about a relationship.

Well, I want to ask you a question this morning about a relationship. "How do you think God views your relationship with him? Are the things you do for Him really the outflow of a living and vibrant relationship with Him, or do they sometimes get in the way of that relationship?"

It's been a few weeks now, but when we last left our study of the Gospel of Luke we finished up the story of the Good Samaritan in chapter 10.

Actually we're introduced to a whole series of interesting characters in Luke 10.

First we saw a lawyer in verse 25, who tried to trick Jesus with religious questions. Then we saw the Priest and the Levite, whose religion was mere ritual. They pass by without helping the half-dead man, so they can stay ritually clean. Then, the Good Samaritan, who loved his neighbor unconditionally and

impartially. And now we're going to meet Martha, who also does acts of love and Mary, who loves Jesus and listens to him.

There's a progression in this chapter. We go from religion, to ritual, to acts of service, to a love relationship with Jesus Christ.

### **Turn to Luke 10 Pg 1005**

The story of Mary and her sister Martha takes just 5 verses, but if you grasp the point of the account it will literally change your life.

Verse 38 sets the scene for us:

### **Read vs 38**

From the other Gospels, we know more about Martha and her sister Mary than Luke tells us here. The name of the town they lived in is Bethany, just outside Jerusalem. Mary and Martha lived with their brother Lazarus.

Later on Lazarus will die and Jesus will raise him from the dead. And in that account, in John Chapter 11 we read these telling words: 11:5 *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*

This was a family that Jesus was very close too. Jesus stayed with this family during the Passover that ended in his crucifixion.

Martha welcomed Jesus into her house. The Greek verb translated "welcomed" means "to entertain as a guest."

Martha was a gracious woman, but more than that she was a spiritually minded woman. Remember, hostility against Jesus was growing now. The religious leaders were beginning to strategize and plot His destruction.

But Martha was a true friend and disciple. She welcomed Him into her house.

Life is filled with stuff to do, isn't it? There are things to do that need to be done. If Martha invited Jesus then His disciples were with Him. They couldn't be allowed to go hungry. Martha had to make sure they had something to eat.

The word "serve" is used 283 times in the Bible. Forty seven of those times are in

the NT and most are in phrases like “serve the Lord,” “serve God,” “serve one another.”

The NT is filled with commands and examples of serving.

In fact, serving is so important in the economy of God that the NT ends by describing eternity this way: Rev 22:3 *And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.*

I. I'd like us to see, first of all, the truth that *It is vitally important in the Kingdom of God to Serve.*

Three weeks ago we had a review of the things that God did here at FCC through our ministries. That was a real time of celebration for us. We passed out our 2002 *Ministry Guide* (we'll have these at the back for anyone who didn't get one last week).

It lists all of the opportunities for service here in this church along with the name of the contact person. We even have a form in the front where you can check off areas of service that interest you so you can get more information about them.

Every person in a congregation needs to be involved in some area of service. A local church is described in the NT as a body. A body is a living organism in which all the parts have a function.

We know that when one of our parts of our human body doesn't work the way it's supposed to we really feel it.

In the OT book of Judges we get the story of what happened after Joshua died. Joshua had led the people of Israel into the promised land in battle against the Canaanites. The people weren't totally victorious and so even after Joshua's death they're still fighting.

*1: 3 So Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me to my allotted territory, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with you to your allotted territory." And Simeon went with him.*

*Then Judah went up, and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek. And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek,*

*and fought against him; and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites.*

*Then Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. And Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me."*

Four little body parts. Two thumbs and two toes, just cut them off and the guy was effectively disabled. He couldn't hold a weapon. He couldn't walk well enough to lead troops in battle. He was ineffective as a military leader.

We need all of our parts for our body to function as it should. We can get by with parts missing or not working, but not as well as we could if they all worked.

That same truth goes for the Body of Christ too. We might be some one who gets a lot of recognition and appreciation for what we do. We could be like an eye. We give a lot of attention to our eyes.

Or we could be a big toe. No exposure. No glamour. Not much recognition. Unless the toe gets cut off. Then all of a sudden the rest of the body realizes how much the toe was needed.

Martha was a server. A worker. *It is vitally important in the Kingdom of God to serve.*

*II. It is possible to become distracted by serving. Read vs 39 & 40*

Martha was a follower of Jesus and so was her sister, Mary.

Now get the picture, Martha is swirling around the house trying to get everything done just the way she wanted it. I believe she wanted to be the best hostess possible. She is going to town trying to pull everything together and then there's Mary, just sitting there oblivious to the fact that there's work to be done.

Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet hearing His word. In first century Jewish culture, to sit at the feet of a teacher was to take your place as a disciple.  
A learner.

Mary wanted to be with Jesus and to learn from Him. To hear His word.

Now see the dilemma. Here's two women with two very different priorities. One sees the work and the other sees an opportunity to be with Jesus.

Now, at this point you might be tempted to say, “What’s this stuff doing in the Bible anyway? What’s the point of getting in the middle of a disagreement between two sisters?”

Actually this whole thing hits right at the heart of the biggest spiritual misunderstanding that most people have. Most of us think if we can just do enough for God He’ll be pleased with us. Our focus is on what we can do. Our relationship with God, in our minds, is measured by what we do for Him.

After all, serving is important. But notice what happened to Martha, she was distracted with much serving!

Distracted from what? She was actually distracted from the person of Jesus Christ!

Our creator is an awesome and powerful God. The Psalmist writes: *O LORD God of hosts, Who is mighty like You, O LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. Who is like the LORD our God, Who dwells on high...* (Psalm 89:8)

He’s awesome and powerful, but He’s also a personal God. He’s created us to serve Him. We can all understand that. We might not do it like we should, but we understand that concept.

But there’s something else God’s created us to do. God has created us to know Him and to love Him personally. The God of all creation wants to have a relationship with you and with me! Above everything else, He’s a personal God.

You can serve God without loving Him but you can’t love God without serving Him. First, before everything else, God wants us to want Him.

Christianity is not about religion. It’s not about lists of rules to do and not do. Christianity is about Christ.

Now see what was happening to Martha. Maybe you can identify with Martha. I know I can. I can see me reacting just like she reacted. But look what was really going on:

Bob Deffinbaugh has done a comprehensive study of the gospel of Luke, and this is what he points out about Martha:

1. Martha wasn't envious of Mary, but angry with her. If Martha had said, "I'd like to sit at your feet, too, Jesus," that would have been one thing. But that's not what she said.

2. It isn't Martha's service which was wrong, but her attitude in that service. I don't think for a minute that both Mary and Martha should have been sitting at Jesus' feet, and that the food just be let go. Martha was not wrong in serving, but her attitude in serving was clearly wrong. Martha had a serving ministry, but not a servant's heart.

3. Martha doesn't see any problem with herself, it's everybody else that's the problem. Martha accused both Mary and Jesus of doing wrong against her. *"Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?"*

Notice, she wasn't asking that to find out the answer. What she really meant was: *"You don't care about me, and I'm jealous that you're spending too much time with my lazy sister who isn't doing what she should be - helping me."*

4. Martha's words reflect not only anger, but a lack of reverence and a lack of submission to God.

Can you imagine blasting Jesus for not caring enough and then giving Him instructions on how He should do things right!

You say, "Boy she was pretty brazen. She was pretty outspoken."

She was, but I believe we are too. Have you ever been upset with God because you thought He didn't care about you? Because He's allowed things to come into your life that are difficult or painful?

Have you ever been angry at God because it was real obvious to you how things should be done, but it seemed like God just left you out on your own?

Martha was so focused on doing her duty, she lost the sense of being in love with her Lord.

- I. *It is vitally important in the Kingdom of God to serve.*
- II. *It is possible to become distracted by serving.*
- III. *Our priority always has to be loving God*

## Read vs 41 & 42

I want you to notice, very carefully here, how Jesus responds to Martha. She's been disrespectful to the Son of God.

He could have called her down in front of everyone. He could have pointed out her sinfulness and rubbed her nose in it. He could have given her a blistering rebuke.

Instead, there's no hint of anger or irritation. The same love and grace that drew Mary to His feet, is the love and grace He shows to Martha.

God isn't interested in beating His children down. His top priority is our spiritual growth. He's like a parent who celebrates his toddler taking steps, even though she may not always be steady on her feet.

He says, *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things."*

"Martha, It won't be too many more months and my life will be over. I'm in the final phase of My ministry. Are you so busy working for Me that you have no time to spend with Me?"

Marriage is about a whole lot more than just doing things, It's about a relationship. Our walk with God is about a whole lot more than just doing things, It's about a relationship too.

How do you think God views your relationship with him? When is the last time you slowed down in life told him, "I love you?"

Are you worried and troubled about many things? Martha wanted to do her best for Jesus. But she forgot one thing. She forgot to ask Jesus what He really wanted.

So He lets her know. **(Read 42 again)**

Now don't misunderstand: This is not a justification for teenagers to refuse to clean up their rooms on the grounds that it is more spiritual to spend all their time lying on their bed reading the Bible.

Nor is this a justification for a monastic lifestyle. Back in the 5th century a man

named Simon Stylites spent the last 36 years of his life on a pillar, 50 feet above the ground, so he could be away from the distractions of life, and be closer to God.

That's not at all what Jesus wants us to understand.

This was all a matter of timing. Mary has understood the urgency of the situation, and who it is that she is talking with. This is Jesus, the Messiah. This is the incarnate Son of God, God in the flesh. This is the one who will be here in the flesh for only a brief while.

What would you do if God showed up at your house? Would you rush around cleaning up? Or would you sit there and listen to God, trusting that he accepts and loves you whether or not the dishes are done?

You see, it's a matter of relationship. Mary knows that we shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And so she choose the better portion - listening to Jesus.

But above all, I believe Mary loves Jesus and hangs on his every word, because she understood more than Jesus own disciples what it would take to purchase the forgiveness of sins.

**Turn to John 12 pg 1040**

This is now Jesus' last week on earth. We're about 6 months or more past Luke 10.

**Read vs 1-8**

Remember, in Luke 9 Jesus had already clearly spoken of His death. *"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."*

By this time in John 12 Jesus had made it crystal clear He was going to die in Jerusalem.

What becomes the focal point of John's memory of this meal wasn't the presents of Lazarus. It wasn't the bravery of Jesus friends to meet with Him at this time. It was Mary and the costly ointment.



Out of all the disciples and followers of Jesus, she understood the significance of what was happening.

To do anything to the feet of a person at this time was a sign of complete humility and dedication. It was the work of the lowest slave.

Here Mary pours out a very expensive ointment and then wipes Christ's feet with her hair. Jesus says, "She has kept this for the day of my burial."

There's something fascinating about this Mary in the NT. You read about her 3 times and each time she's at the feet of Jesus. I don't think that it's a coincidence that she had the spiritual discernment that even Jesus' own disciples lacked. She got it at the feet of Christ.

How did Mary listen? Very attentively. She hung on every word. She didn't let things go in one ear and out the other. She didn't day dream while Jesus was around. She listened.

She listened and she worshipped. She wasn't there to make requests of Jesus. She wasn't there to meet with other believers. She didn't come to be refreshed after a hard weeks work. She came to worship.

Judas said, "What's going on here? That ointment could have been sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor."

A Roman denarii was a days wage for a common laborer. This was a lot of money. But notice, Judas wasn't really concerned about the poor. He was the treasurer and he stole money from the money bag.

Mary freely gave what cost 300 denarii, Judas was about to betray Jesus for a little over 100 denarii (For 30 pieces of silver). At the very time Satan was influencing the heart of Judas to do the worst against Christ, the Holy Spirit moved mightily in Mary's heart to pour out her love for Him.

Mary is remembered for her act of love. Judas is remembered for his act of treachery and deceit.

Lots of parents name their daughters Mary, but I don't know anyone who's named their son Judas!

Mary sat at the feet of Jesus Christ. Mary listened to the Word of Christ. Mary loved Jesus Christ because she understood who He was and what He had come to do.

She had a true relationship of loving dependence with Jesus Christ. It was a relationship based on grace - God's divine mercy - from start to finish.

There's a remarkable difference between Christianity and every other religion in the world. You can remove the founder from another religion and you'll still have the religion. It doesn't matter whether it's Buddha, or Zoroaster, or Mohammed.

Remove the founder and the religions stand because religions are ethical systems.

Remove Christ from Christianity and you're left with nothing. Even the ethics of Christianity don't make sense without Jesus.

All other religions teach that we can reach God by what we do. What they say you have to do varies from religion to religion, but it all comes back to what we do.

The Bible says that there's nothing we could ever do to reach God. Isaiah 57:15 says He's... *the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy...*

We could no more reach out to the Almighty God of creation than an ant could stop you on the street and have a conversation with you.

But, now suppose you could become an ant. Suddenly the lines of communication would be open.

The NT tells us this about Jesus: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

It was God who stepped down to our level. It was God who had something to communicate to us. And the Word of communication, that essence of who God is became flesh in Jesus Christ.

God had a message for us. Hebrews 1 *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...*

God's message is very personal. It's a message of holiness and righteousness, but it's also a message of awesome love.

God said to His people Israel: *...your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you*

The Bible says that's true of all of us. We've all sinned and come short of God's glory.

Isaiah 1:18 *"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.*

God is our redeemer. He came in Jesus Christ for two reasons: 1) So we could know the character of God in a way that we could understand  
2) So that He could destroy the barrier that we put up with our sins.

Mary knew that Jesus was headed for the cross. She worshipped Him because He was willing to die for her so that she might be forgiven for her sins.

Back in Luke 10, Jesus says *"Mary has chosen that good part..."* Mary choose to intimately love her Savior.

How about you? I have to admit, I'm a whole lot more like Martha than I am like Mary.

Why is it that don't we listen to Jesus more? What stops you from listening to him?

Let me challenge you this week- don't settle for mere religion, or even self-sacrifice - ENJOY GOD

Don't stop doing good things like Martha. But don't let them distract you from the first thing he wants you to do most of all. Enjoy being with him.

There's no better place to be, no place we are more welcome to be, than at the feet of our Lord. When we fall at His feet, we acknowledge His majesty, power, and goodness, and our need. When we fall at His feet, we rightly reflect the response of the creature to the Creator. No sinner in the New Testament ever hesitated to come to Jesus' feet. The self-righteous wouldn't be caught dead there, because of their pride and arrogance, but the sinner found the feet of Jesus a welcome place. We are always welcome at His feet.

See, some day we'll all find ourselves at Jesus' feet. His people, those who have trusted in Him for salvation, will be at His feet in worship, adoration, and praise. But those who have rejected Him will also be at His feet.

Hebrews 10, speaking of Jesus says, *But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.*

Come to His feet now, like Mary, in humility, in dependence, and in adoration. He and He alone welcomes and saves sinners. It's Jesus Christ Himself who said these words in Matthew 11 *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*