

The Priorities of a Disciple

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[0 : 00] I want to start off this evening by asking you a question. What is your house like when you have guests? So we've just finished the few days of Christmas celebrations.

Thousands upon thousands of houses across the UK would have been entertaining guests.

Shopping done days in advance. Time taken to perfect the meal plan.

Cleaning and tidying non-stop right up until the minute the doorbell goes. Restrictions maybe on which room occupants of the house can go into and which they can't.

Does any of that sound familiar for you guys over the last few days? So when we have guests, my wife Sabina and I usually cook and tidy the house together. So we do the hoovering, the dusting, we fold the blankets on the couches in the living room, we puff up the pillows and then we set the table and so on.

And once all of those preparations are done, we can't really sit on the couch just in case we make it look untidy again. Because everything needs to be in perfect order for our guests arriving.

[1 : 10] That's what it's like when we have guests, isn't it? We want to have a nice home. We want our guests to feel welcome. We want our guests to feel appreciated and things to go as well as possible.

But if that's how we act when we have friends and family around for dinner, imagine how different the preparations would be and even more they would be if we had Jesus coming around to share a meal with us.

Our preparations would be more than a hundred times that, wouldn't they? Well, that's the scene that we get an insight into this evening as we look at Luke chapter 10 together.

And tonight we're going to see two different people, two different sisters, and how they respond to having Jesus as a guest in their home. So if you have a Bible, please turn with me to Luke chapter 10, and we'll start reading from verse 38.

Luke chapter 10, verses 38 to 42. As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a town, to a village, where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

[2 : 32] 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 all the work by myself?

Tell her to help me. 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. Let's pray. Father, may the meditations of our hearts and the words of my mouth be pleasing to you, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen. These verses are part of the traveling narrative of Jesus. So his public ministry has begun, and he's gathered a bit of a following now.

His disciples are with him, and he has a big, big crowd. And you see that from the beginning of chapter 10, as he sends out the 72. But this is still early on in Jesus' ministry, and journey towards Jerusalem.

[3 : 51] Luke mentions that in chapter 9, verse 51, that Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. Meaning that every step he took, he was walking towards the cross.

All the while teaching his disciples, preparing them for the day that he would no longer be with them. And calling them to live lives which glorify God.

And that's where our verses come in this evening. They're sandwiched between two exemplary sections of Luke's gospel. Directly before it, we have the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus is teaching his disciples, and calling them to love their neighbors.

Calling his disciples to be caring, attentive, loving, and sacrificial to those around them. And then directly after our little passage, is the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus is teaching his disciples how to pray, saying that we pray to God and God alone.

That we come before him with genuine hearts and rely on him. And that we come before him with reverence, because he is God and we are not.

[5 : 06] And we come before him in humility, acknowledging that all things come from him. And so maybe you're sitting there thinking, well, why on earth is he going on about all of this?

Well, I'm mentioning all of this because it gives us the important context that we need to look at and understand our passage for this evening. Knowing the context helps us see the main point and focus of our passage, which is the priorities of a disciple.

The priorities of a disciple. Now, I chose this passage this evening because I think that going into a new year, how different would our lives be?

What are our goals? What are the things that we want to give our time to in 2020? The best thing for us to do is to have the priorities of a disciple, isn't it?

The best we can do, the best way we can live is according to God's word and how it sets out the priorities of a disciple. So tonight we're going to see those two different responses to Jesus in this passage.

[6 : 21] So Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and comes to the village where Mary and Martha live with their brother Lazarus. And we know that from other gospels. But Lazarus doesn't really appear in this section.

We know the village as Bethany. It's on the main road between Galilee and Jerusalem, just a few miles away from Jesus' destination. And this was a family that Jesus held very dear.

And so we can assume that he was a frequent guest at their table. Both of these sisters, Mary and Martha, are disciples of Jesus. Both of them seem to understand to an extent who he is.

So Jesus walks into the town in verse 38. And you can already imagine the hustle and bustle as the news spreads like wildfire of his arrival, can't you? Jesus, the one who's been teaching and doing many signs and wonders through the whole of Israel, has now come to our little town of Bethany. All the people are wanting to gather and hear this famous teacher. And so he arrives and in verse 38, he's invited back to Mary and Martha's house by Martha.

[7 : 41] So let's think a little bit about Martha and her response to having Jesus as a house guest and see what it teaches us about the priorities of a disciple.

Now having people around for dinner naturally means there's work to do, doesn't it? You've got all the preparations beforehand, the need doing, the cooking and the tidying, but on top of that, you've got the work that you need to put in when the guests are actually in the house.

And remember that in Jesus' day, you couldn't exactly pick up the phone and tell people you were leaving the house so they knew approximately when you'd arrive. And you couldn't drop a text saying that you're five minutes away to do the last minute preparations.

And so in this time, when the guests arrived, it would be straight into hostess mode. And that's what Martha does. She's willing to serve. She's maybe the hospitable type and enjoys making her guests happy and catered for.

So she's running around getting things ready. But then the situation turns a little bit awkward in verse 40, doesn't it? Look what it says. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.

[8 : 54] She came to him, that is Jesus, and asked, Lord, don't you care that my sisters left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me. Now at this point, people can be quite harsh on Martha and say that she was wrong because she was preparing things for Jesus and his followers.

But the fact that she was preparing things is not bad at all. The negative thing about this situation is that she's let her preparations distract her from Jesus and his teaching.

That's what Matthew draws our attention to in verse 40. The problem isn't that she's preparing things. The problem is that she's distracted. Martha is working so hard for Jesus that she's actually distracted from his presence in the house.

So the problem isn't service. It's that she's been engulfed in it and she's taken her eyes off of Jesus. Now there obviously isn't a direct line of application here because I can't imagine any of us are having Jesus around for a meal in the new year.

However, many of us are in Christian service to a degree. Maybe it's preaching. Maybe it's leading services. Maybe it's helping with children's work.

[10:20] Maybe it's leading the music. Maybe it's on the welcome team or tea and coffee. Maybe it's part of the food and events team. Whatever it is. Whatever kind of role you have in church you probably know how easy it is for us to get so involved in that service that we actually seem to forget that we're doing all of it for Jesus.

We forget the very person we should be serving. It's so easy isn't it to dive into serving God and the church that we can become grumpy and grumble at those who don't serve as much as we do.

But what exactly is the problem in that situation? Well often the problem is found in our own hearts because it reveals that we're maybe serving for the sake of serving rather than serving out of an act of devotion and worship to the Lord.

Now don't get me wrong this is not an excuse for laziness in regards to serving God. This isn't a call for all of us to put down tools and do nothing but it is a call for us to ask ourselves the very important question in my service for Jesus what are my priorities?

Am I serving Him out of love and devotion or am I serving Him because I want to be seen because I want to be recognized or out of some unwilling sense of duty?

[11:57] The reality is that all of our service for God and the church should be done out of devotion to Him out of a love for Him and His people. Martha's frustration with Mary is normal for those who so sacrificially serve with very good intentions but who sometimes forget that they too need to sit at the feet of Jesus.

I read a missionary book a while back and in it the missionary was explaining how his ministry was growing and growing and thriving people coming to faith and it was wonderful but then he became really sober and he said ministry became an idol.

He focused on the ministry as opposed to the master. He was so focused on doing things that it distracted him from Jesus and I think that that is a real danger that all of us need to be on the lookout for.

Sometimes we need to take a step back and look at the big picture because we can keep ourselves so busy with church life can't we? We can fill our diaries and run around non-stop but how often do we recognize that we too need to sit at the feet of Jesus and just learn?

The priorities of a disciple shouldn't be busyness and distraction from Jesus but they should be devotion to him and service out of a love for him.

[13:32] And that's what Jesus says to Martha in the most loving and gentle rebuke in verse 41. Jesus says Martha Martha you're 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. Now Jesus isn't rebuking Martha harshly for not sitting at his feet and learning but he's encouraging her.

You can imagine the scene can't you? Jesus sitting on a wooden bench in the garden surrounded by people keenly listening intently hanging on every single word that comes out of his mouth and then he sees Martha working away in the background and he catches her eye and says Martha everything's fine.

Don't worry about the to-do list that you've set for yourself just come here sit join us I've saved you a seat. It's so easy for us to become engulfed in our working and serving that we become distracted. But imagine if going into this new year our priority wasn't filling our time with things that need doing imagine if we didn't have another year where we're distracted from Jesus because we're too busy to sit and learn imagine if we went into this year deliberately making time to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn that's what Mary did that's what the second sister did so let's think about Mary and what she can teach us about the priorities of a disciple now two things are mentioned in this passage about Mary firstly in verse 39 we're given the detail that she's sitting at the Lord's feet listening to what he said and then secondly in verse 41 Jesus says Mary has chosen what is better and none of it will be taken away from her now Mary is sat at the feet of

[15:50] Jesus a position of a student learning from their master this is the posture of a disciple who's learning from their Lord have you ever watched little children and how they copy those around them children learn to do everyday things by watching their parents in action all the time sure they need a little bit of help in the beginning in the early years but as time goes on they become more and more independent they become competent and able to copy what their parents have done that's how we learn that's why when children are young parents are even more careful

than normal not to show any bad habits in front of them because they soak up everything like a sponge we're born with that natural instinct to sit and learn it is how we learn by default it is how we grow and develop and that's why one of the priorities of a disciple should be to sit at the feet of Jesus like a child listen to every single word that he says imitate at him as we live according to his priorities like children we need to soak in the word of God so that we can grow into mature believers whether you're nine or ninety there is always growth and that's what

Mary's doing she is sitting at the feet of Jesus with the rest of his followers soaking in his teaching and wisdom so what does this convey about Mary well it shows us that she had faith and some kind of understanding of who Jesus is it shows us that she was willing to submit to his teaching and act on it willing to live out his teaching and it shows us that she loved Jesus and wanted to serve him she was one of his followers her posture sitting at the feet of Jesus shows us that Mary loved the Lord loved his word and wanted to be the best disciple that she could be now imagine if that was our priority as we look into the new year imagine if from the very beginning of 2020 we make a conscious decision to submit to the word of the Lord as revealed in the Bible and live in such a way that we give God all the glory imagine if we had just an ounce of what we see in

Mary as she left all of her worries behind and just sat at the feet of Jesus if we did this I think our devotional lives would be healthier because we wouldn't be trying to squeeze in that five minute Bible reading and prayer in the morning but we consciously take time to reflect on God's word and submit to it even though it will make us uncomfortable if we actually take time to be listeners and doers of God's word then we will be more open and available for the Lord to use us to share the gospel to share the good news of Jesus with people to be his witnesses to the world and we will be more joyful in our service if we took a leaf out of Mary's book and invest time in listening to the Lord then I think we'd be more devoted to him again this doesn't mean that we only listen and do nothing it doesn't mean that we can sit back and relax but it means that we become active listeners of the word of the Lord though we come under the authority of the Bible and live life in such a way that glorifies him the life that we're called to live we are called to be perfect because he is perfect by doing that

Jesus says we're doing a good thing in verse 42 Jesus says of Mary Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her now again this is part of that loving and gentle rebuke of Martha but it tells us a little bit about Mary's priorities and the priorities that Jesus wants for his disciples Mary chose what was better meaning that her decision to sit to listen and to learn from Jesus was a better choice than preparing him a meal it was better because Jesus was only with them for a short while because soon the day would come when he wouldn't be around anymore and the opportunity to learn from him would be gone it was better because Mary was spending time in the presence of Jesus God in the flesh and learning from him we've just come through a few busy days of celebration and we're going into what will undoubtedly be another busy year so why not take time take a few minutes this evening or tomorrow or whenever you get a chance and just sit under the Lord's teaching sit under the authority of the Bible ask for God to be at work in your life ask for his spirit to continue that transformational work in you and ask that God would help you submit to him ask for strength to live as a good disciple whose desire is to see God glorified pray for spiritual growth and maturity pray that you'd prioritize God and his kingdom in the year that is coming just take that little bit of time before the mayhem begins to sit at the Lord's feet and Jesus says that it will not be taken away now we can assume based on the context that Jesus is speaking about Mary listening to him and the relationship that she has with him he is saying that Mary isn't wasting her time because she is investing in her relationship with the Lord and that relationship will never be taken from her Mary's focusing and learning from Jesus and the things that she is learning are the very truths that will carry her through the difficulties of life they are the truths that point her to Jesus as God in the flesh and the truths these truths are the words of eternal life nobody can take that away from her and friends as you sit under the teaching of Jesus no one can take that from you either when we sit under the truths of the word of God as we sit at the feet of Jesus they are the truths that change our hearts they are the truths that fuel a life of devotion and service of

[23 : 09] God because if we know who he is then we will want to serve him then we will want to be the best disciples we can be for his glory a good indication of someone sitting at the feet of Jesus is someone who's being transformed by those words by the teaching and someone whose life is being changed you can never really know the scriptures until you're willing to be changed by them

everyone seems to have a theory of what the problems are with the global church every Christian has had conversations about what the church needs to be a better place and every Christian has pondered how we can reach more people how we can be better equipped to live life in a fallen broken world but friends the answer is not in the newest strategy from the celebrity pastors it's not in the new ministries by the biggest churches around the answer is not found in programs or busyness the the answer is that we need to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn service is good but disconnected from fellowship it's useless we don't invite people over or go to people's houses to sit at their kitchen tables for them to be running around constantly making foods do we no we go there and we invite people so that we can have fellowship enjoy company build on relationships and it's the same with service without sitting at the feet of Jesus service is meaningless we can do all if we want but unless we have a meaningful relationship with the Lord and we're devoted to him then we're just ticking off our own checklist of to-dos service is important but it must come from a healthy relationship with the Lord and it must be born out of time sitting at his feet and learning friends as we draw to a close the thing that these two sisters teach us about the priorities of a disciple are that we should serve out of a devotion to the Lord but not let the busyness of life distract us from him and we need to sit under the teaching of Jesus and hear his word let me tell you that there is no better way to spend your time than in the presence and word of our wonderful savior Jesus Christ let's pray together father as we think of this new year coming our way we pray that you would be our priority we pray that we would be humble and Lord that we would submit to your word that we would set aside time to invest in our relationship with you to grow in our understanding of who you are of who we are in you because of the wonderful gospel of Jesus Christ father help us look to you help us focus on you and help us be good and better worshipers of you for your glory and for the upbuilding of your kingdom in Jesus name amen love you let's gather and help us guys we love you we love you you grace you the amazing