**ONE THING IS NEEDED**

**(SPIRITUAL BALANCE)**

**Luke 10:38-42 Key Verses 10:41-42**

**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.”**

**Very honestly when I first read these five verses I had no idea why they were coupled up in the same chapter as the story of Jesus sending out the 72 and the story of the Good Samaritan. To be honest, I wasn’t even supposed to serve this passage, I was actually scheduled to serve next week’s passage, “The Lord’s Prayer”. I was so excited and looking forward to serving that passage. I knew several months in advance and I had been meditating on it and had a lot I wanted to say. I thought it was one of the most important passages I could have the privilege to serve, but then several weeks ago, Shep. William, who was originally going to serve this passage asked if we could switch with one another. I remember when he first asked me, I thought to myself for a split second, “Really? You want to switch with me? But I really want to serve the message on the Lord’s Prayer…” But all I could say to Shep. William was, “Sure! Of course! No problem!” He had come to me. He trusted me, enough to ask me. He loved me enough to ask me of all the messengers if I would switch with him. Of all the coworkers he thought highly enough of me to ask and chose me over all my coworkers. How blessed I am! And how loved I am by Shep. William! I really did thank God. But I wouldn’t be telling the whole story if I didn’t confess that I had a sense of loss that I wasn’t going to serve that passage. Actually, a little later I realized that in reality the passage on the “Lord’s Prayer” was meant to be served by Shep. William because he is such a man of prayer and God had chosen him because he is going to give us God’s Word on this subject with such power and authority, to encourage and strengthen us! And I really do mean that! I’m excited and looking forward to what our Lord wants to say to us next week through Shep. William.**

**But to get back to today’s passage, after I said “Yes” to Shep. William, I immediately looked at the passage I was now being asked to serve and when I read these five verses I felt a real letdown. I went from the “Lord’s Prayer” to “At the home of Martha and Mary”. I’m really not sexist, I’m really not, but I have to say I really felt like I got the short end of the stick on this one. And when I read the passage, as I shared I couldn’t for the life of me understand why Luke thought this story was that important and why he chose to place it here in chapter 10. On the surface it appears to be a story of sisterly rivalry and the simple point that Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet was better than Martha’s busy mindedness. I really didn’t think there was much of a message there. I began to think because my messages were notoriously so long and tedious and boring that this was a clever way to make my message short, ridiculously short; some might say mercifully short.**

**But as I deeply began to meditate and contemplate and think about this passage, I learned one thing. These couple of verses are deeply profound and important for us. I began to understand why Luke placed this passage where he did and why it was so important a story. God did not give me the leftover message. He was giving me the great privilege to serve this wonderful message for all of us, because it is for us. This message is rightly and perfectly timed for us at this moment. And I truly believe that.**

**Many believe that this passage is a story of contrast of what we should do and what we shouldn’t do. That what Martha did was ‘bad’ and what Mary did was ‘good.’ But in reality that is not what this story is about at all. This is a story of balance and what comes first. We are told that we are to Love God, with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. But there is a tension between these two. There is a real balancing act that must take place to do both. In truth it is not easy to maintain this balance of our spiritual lives; no one can be spiritually healthy who does not meditate on God’s Word and commune with Him through prayer and no one on the other hand, can be as they should be who is not active and diligent in service to our Lord. The challenge is how to maintain and balance the two and to keep each in relative proportion to the other; we must not be so active as to neglect communion with our Lord, but many of us do; nor are we to be so contemplative as to become unpractical to serve the flock God has placed before us.**

**Chapter 10 as a whole has several lessons on this subject. Look at Luke 10:17-20, “17 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.” 18 He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” The 72, who were sent out, returned from their mission field filled with joy at their successes, but our Lord tempered that joy and prevented them from being filled with pride. He told them to instead rejoice that their names were written in Heaven. He directed their thoughts to the fact that they had been chosen by God, so that thoughts of gratitude might sober them after such a successful work; He wanted them to consider themselves as debtors of God’s Love and grace. He wisely protected them as young and new workers to not forget that they were the Chosen of God, by God alone and no merit of their own and therefore debtors of Christ. Basically, that they wouldn’t become big headed.**

**The second story we read in chapter 10 is the story of the Good Samaritan that discusses about the subject of service; to know who our neighbor is and to know where and how we direct our service to God and to our neighbor. But then in today’s passage, as a counterweight, we read the story of the two sisters from Bethany, Martha and Mary, that no one would think service to God is only a matter of physical help to our neighbor. Just as we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, we are to first and most importantly love God, with ALL our heart, soul, strength and mind and worship Him. We must have daily communion with Him through His Word and through prayer. Today’s passage is meant to teach us that while we ought to abound in service, and to do good to our neighbor, we must not fail in our worship toward God, in spiritual reverence, in meek discipleship, and quiet contemplation. Just as we are to be practical, like the 72; practical like the Samaritan man; even practical like Martha, we are also like our Lord Jesus, to come early in the morning and commune with God; like Mary to sit down and quietly listen to our Lord and nourish our souls with His life giving Word. In reality, service to our neighbor without God’s Word overflowing in our hearts, is like serving a hamburger, but only the bun and no meat.**

**When we look closely at Martha and Mary, we see how marvelous they were: they were both true believers, they both loved Jesus, they were both loved by Jesus (the Bible specifically says they and their brother Lazarus were loved by Jesus). Jesus chose to stay at their home on many occasions and reveals that their home was His home. Yet, these two women were very different from one another. They had very different strengths and gifts, but also different weaknesses.**

**Some use this passage to criticize Martha and to lift up Mary and her response. But it would be wrong to treat Martha as if she had no love for what was good or right or that she was nothing more than a worldly centered person. In reality, Martha was a true follower and lover of Christ. She loved nothing more than to welcome Jesus into her home and to serve Him. When she first heard that Jesus was coming to visit, her first thought was, “Jesus is coming! We must prepare Him a banquet fit for a King!” Perhaps, when Jesus entered the house she could see in His eyes, tiredness or physical exhaustion. Perhaps, she could see the deepening of the wrinkles or the premature greying of His hair, making Him look older than He really was. So she made a decision to prepare a feast for our Lord in order to invigorate and encourage and strengthen Him. She busied herself with many things, that everything would be perfect for our Lord. But just as one matter was settled, another matter rose up in her mind that she felt needed to be taken care of and she began to become worried and troubled over them. She wanted everything to be perfect for Jesus and understandably so. But she also noticed that her younger sister didn’t seem to have any sense of problem over all these matters at all. This only upset her more; and so she asked Jesus to scold her and to send her immediately to the kitchen to help her.**

**Now Mary on the other hand, had a completely different point of view; as soon as she saw Jesus enter into her home, she thought, “What a privilege I have to listen to my Lord! Every Word from His mouth is like dew from Heaven.” Crowds gathered around Jesus and jostled and wrestled with one another to get close enough to listen to His Words. One time Jesus was in a home and it was so crowded that the friends of a paralyzed man had to some ninja moves and scale the walls and cut a hole in the roof and rappel down ropes in order to get close to Jesus; but here was Jesus going to speak in Mary’s home and she could take the best seat in the house and not miss a single Word from her Master! She understood the privilege she was being given. Very honestly, at this time, women were not expected to sit in when the ‘men’ began to speak. They were supposed to quietly remain busy and serve the men and hopefully catch a word or two at best, while shuttling in and out the dishes from the kitchen. Many misunderstand the idea that women are men’s helpmates to mean that women do the busy work, while men do the spiritual work. This story is telling, in that it is a story of two women. One who does what is normally expected of women, and the other who has the courage to do what was supposed to be reserved for men. To be very honest I thank God for the monthly women’s meeting. I thank God for the Women’s yearly Bible conference. I thank God that our women, who work so hard and care for many matters that we men prefer to ignore and hand off to our wives and sisters in the Lord, have an opportunity to sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to Him at least once a month and have a Bible conference that is completely dedicated to them coming and listening to Jesus and communing with Him, without all the worries and distractions of being mothers and wives and good helpmates. I pray that they can do so more often.**

**But I would like to go back to Mary’s thoughts and how she understood the gift that was being presented to her and how she wasn’t going to let it escape her for a minute. She understood how valuable a thing she was getting to partake of, how precious it was to sit at the feet of our Lord and to listen to His Words directly and not by word of mouth from her brother or some other man. She could sit before Jesus and listen to Him all by herself. She knew it was a privilege, she knew it was a gift.**

**How many of us feel this way? How many know how valuable a gift we have been given that we can sit at the feet of our Lord and listen to Him free of charge and without limit and that He is willing to speak to us? How many of us really take advantage of this gift He has given to us? I must shamefully confess that I have taken this gift of God’s Word for granted. Because I can open the Bible anytime, I took it as no big deal. I have treated God’s Word like it was an hors-d'oeuvre, to be eaten at my leisure and pleasure, and when I wanted to, but not as the truly amazing gift that it is for my soul and life. God’s Word is manna from Heaven. God’s Word nourishes my soul. And the same is true of prayer. We have been given the most amazing gift that we can come and speak to our King and Lord and Savior, without restrictions or any barrier of any kind, and at any and all times. And honestly, I must confess I don’t take advantage of this gift God has given to me.**

**I thank God for our growing disciples and leaders, who for the past 9 weeks have gathered every Friday to study God’s Word together, to be mutually edified and strengthened and to listen to what He has to say to each of them. I also thank God that many have made a decision to gather Monday through Friday at 5:30 at the backhouse to pray together. I pray that even as the 12 week program comes to an end, that they would find a way to continue to meet together continuously and sit at Jesus’ feet because it is the one thing that is needed and also continue to gather early in the morning to pray together.**

**When we look at these two sisters, we can see that in reality just as much as Martha was serving our Lord, Mary was too. Both meant to honor our Lord. Jesus does not chastise Martha for her service, but that she was worried about many things. But in today’s passage Mary’s service is expressly praised and pointed out to be better. And this is what we want to think about in today’s passage. The punch line is very simple. Good works should flow from a Christ-centered life; good works do not produce a Christ-centered life.**

**In our ministry, we have been taught to “Go”, “Do”, “Make”, “Serve” and it is proper and right. But service that does not flow from first sitting at the feet of Jesus and worshipping Him, is not healthy or balanced or what Jesus is looking for. We must first come sit at the feet of Jesus, open our Bibles, meditate and contemplate and nourish our souls daily with His Word and out of that should flow our service to Him. As I shared, chapter 10 is the chapter of service and what it looks like and also the pitfalls and dangers we must be careful to avoid and also where our service derives its power and purpose and meaning. It all begins at the feet of our Lord.**

**I really pray that each and every one of us would newly make a decision to learn from Mary who did what was better, not to say what we have been doing is not recognized or needed or unimportant, but that it may be in its proper place. I really believe that as the summer is fast approaching, and we prepare ourselves for our new school year that we would do first things first, prepare ourselves by coming early to God’s Word faithfully and praying daily as well. I truly believe that this is going to be where we will see God work in us and through us for His glory and our complete joy. I think this is what Jesus wants to tell each of us at this moment.**

**Personally, I thank God for this passage to me; because quite frankly I’m more like Martha than Mary. I do love the Lord, and I really want to do something in service to Him in a very practical and tangible way. As many know I open my home most Sunday’s to students and coworkers as my spiritual act of worship and to have communion with Him and with others. I really do my very best with my family to prepare the best environment for others to really enjoy sweet fellowship with us and others and to not have to lift a finger in preparation. I really enjoy when young moms who have young children come to our home and can actually sit down at dinner time and actually get to eat without having every few seconds get up and attend to their children or their hungry husband. I really thank God for my five sons who always step up and take care of the young children and entertain and play with them, while their mothers get to finally eat like normal people. Very honestly it is a service I delight in doing and I thank God for my family, my wife and sons and my daughter Maggie who also work so hard to prepare this together week in and week out.**

**But today’s passage convicted me that as much as I do this, I need to start first and foremost in my worship of Him, through reading His Word and praying. My service needs to draw its source from my Lord. If my own cup is not filled by Him, I honestly have nothing to truly give to others. It’s only when I have come to Him in reverence and worship and sit at His feet and listen to Him that I can do what He has called me to do. Not only my service on Sunday, but even more importantly to go fishing and studying His Word with others. Very honestly this year, my decision was to go fishing newly at UCLA, but very honestly, I really didn’t do so, and I really didn’t want to and I couldn’t understand why it was the case. I knew I should go and I knew it was the right thing, but still I didn’t go. I often said it was because I was busy and UCLA is so far and I’m getting older and don’t have the energy or strength to go, but through this passage I could see that the real reason was because I was trying to serve God without worshipping Him. I thought I could develop a Christ-centered life by being busy with many works, instead of good works, including fishing flowing out of my Christ-centered life. I really thank God for this passage. I truly am thankful and joyful, because I know what I need to pray for and what I need to do first. One thing is needed. I need to worship my Lord and Savior as of first importance. I pray we would all do the same this summer and for that matter to the end or our lives and I’m genuinely excited what this fall brings if we do so.**

**ONE WORD: One Thing Is Needed.**