

Uncommon Love 2) Listening to the Son

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Sometimes it can be hard to determine what is most important. In a few days I'll be taking my family camping. When we go camping, we usually don't have a lot of room to spare. Fitting ten people and a dog into our van doesn't leave tons of room for non-essential items. Nonetheless, our children like to bring their toys along. To make sure we have room we have to tell them, "you can only bring the toys that are most important to you." Last time we went camping that meant each of them coming up with a backpack stuffed full of things they just had to bring along. Apparently, determining what is most important isn't so easy when dealing with toys. What about when it comes to determining what is most important in spiritual matters? Today we will look at time when two sisters had a disagreement about what was most important. And Jesus makes the answer clear for them and for us.

Recall that Jesus had sent 72 disciples out to preach. He had instructed them to not worry about what they would carry, would eat, or where they would stay as they went out preaching ahead of him. That's because one fruit of faith the Spirit works in the heart of God's people is that they would support full-time gospel workers. Jesus himself followed this same pattern. He certainly had supported himself as he grew and worked as a carpenter. But when he began his full-time teaching and preaching, he received support from believers in different towns. Wherever he traveled his long-time and new disciples would provide for his needs. Luke even mentions by name a few women who were disciples of Jesus and helped support him. Today we get to meet one woman that welcomed Jesus as a guest and provided for him: Martha. This is what a disciple of Jesus does. They welcome Jesus into their home, welcome his Word, support his teaching.

For Martha this was a big job. We don't know if Jesus' twelve disciples were going ahead of him or were also joining him on this occasion. Either way it seems that Martha had plenty to keep her busy as she hosted Jesus. And who could blame her? She has the Lord at her house, and she would have certainly desired to serve him well with food and lodging.

Martha had a sister with other ideas. It's not that her sister, Mary, totally avoided helping. In fact, Martha indicates that Mary left her alone to serve, implying Mary certainly had been involved with serving. But Mary was also occupied with other tasks. "Mary also sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to his words." This is what a disciple of a teacher does. They respectfully sit at the foot of their teacher to listen to instruction. Mary was a disciple of Jesus too, so, she did what disciples also do, listen and learn.

Martha, however kept busy at serving. When she saw how Mary had left her to serve alone you can imagine why she felt upset. Martha knew what was up. That kitchen wasn't going to clean itself. The dinner wasn't going to make itself ready. Martha continued behind the scenes while everyone else sat. Finally she had to point this out to Jesus, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve all alone? So, tell her to give me a hand!" She wasn't upset at her Lord so much as Mary who had abandoned her. "She's left me to serve alone!"

We might look at Martha's lot and say she certainly got the short end of the deal. Yet when Scripture describes her it says Martha was distracted. When Jesus evaluated her mindset; he says she is, "worried and upset about many things." Is that a fair evaluation? Martha was helping! She invited Jesus as guest. She had a responsibility. Wasn't she nobly carrying out her noble task? If I pulled up to a campsite with my family and it was getting dark out and I asked for someone to help me set up the tent I don't think it would be fair for my wife to say, "You are worried and upset about too many things." If we were trying to serve eight little children a picnic meal out in the woods and my wife asked me to give her a hand and bring the cooler I wouldn't say, "You are worried and upset about many things."

So, what was Martha's problem? Her problem didn't lie in her service. It wasn't that she had too much on her plate. It wasn't that her service lacked importance. It was no doubt a lot and it was certainly important. Her problem was that she didn't regard what Mary had chosen to do as more important. In short, the problem wasn't what was on her plate, it was her attitude toward what God wanted to put on her plate. She saw service as more important than being served God's Word. God desires more than our service and our hands. Our God desires our ears and our hearts first and foremost.

Do we rightly identify what is most important? A Christian mother can get so occupied with serving her family that she fails to see what God sets before her. She can be so occupied with making sure her children are fed and nourished that she can fail to feed herself the Bread of Life and take time for the Word. It's not bad or wrong for her to concern herself with her family. Their needs are important and necessary. But the greatest need lies with her own soul first. A Christian father could spend so much time trying to give his family all that he can. But if he is so busy with serving his family that he fails to make time for sitting at the feet of Jesus he fails in everything. It doesn't matter how great a life he gives his children if he himself is not a man fed by Jesus' Word. He fails to give them an example of listening to God's Word and fails to feed his own soul so that he can be the father God has called him to be. A man or woman serving at church can get so occupied on the meeting, the report, the giving, the counting, the serving, the setting up or taking down, the cleaning or the fixing that they lose sight of what is most important. It is sometimes said, "I can't make it to this week's worship or Bible class, pastor, because I have company." How would Jesus evaluate that attitude? Even if God himself were your guest he'd say forget about serving for one hour and be served.

Don't misunderstand. Jesus isn't saying service is unimportant. But it is a problem when that becomes the most important to us and we turn the Christian life upside down. Martha was doing a good thing too serving God and others. If anyone could have claimed they were serving their God, it was Martha who was preparing a meal for the Son of God himself in human flesh. She rightly calls him Lord because he is the Lord of all, and he does deserve all our service. But we learn here that what is most important is not serving. What is most important is being served by God. **When the life of service overtakes the life of being served by God, the Christian life has been turned upside down.** Above all else the Christian is not merely a servant. The Christian is a disciple of Jesus. That takes feeding on his Word.

We know our discipleship and listening is more important than serving. But do we act like it? If you're like me, you are easily worried and upset about many things too. You are tired when serving gets hard. But are you ever worried and upset that you missed time with Jesus? When is the last time it bothered you that you missed out on personal or group Bible study? If anything is going to make you worried or upset ought it not be missing out on that?

Is there anything that you could occupy your time with that is better than listening to, hearing, reading, taking to heart the Word of God? Is there any task so noble and so mighty that you could claim it is of greater importance than sitting at the feet of the Lord to hear his Word? Jesus says none is better. "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things. But only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her."

What Jesus is teaching Martha and all of us here is essentially the same thing he had been teaching the people of Israel for 1500 years. When he gave the third commandment, he not only gave them permission to stop working, he commanded it. He forbade them from any type of work. He stressed that it was not only okay to stop being busy with necessary things, they were to forgo necessary things. They were to simply stop all else. The Sabbath rest was given as a day for rest and for sacred assembly. It was a day to cease from the busyness of life and to mediate on the Word of God. There was nothing regarded as so important that it could not be set aside for that day. It was used as a day for teaching and preaching and listening to the word of Jesus. We don't know if Jesus was teaching here on a Sabbath or not, but the same principle behind that Sabbath is emphasized: God's Word is the most important thing in life. It is even more important than work and service to God and others.

This is an uncommon love! We are served by God! Every religion, it would seem, puts a lot of focus on what you say, think, or do. And please don't misunderstand. They aren't entirely wrong about making service to God and others important tenants. True religion will involve a change in your life that includes love and service to God and others. Last week we began a series on what makes a Christian's love so uncommon. It is unlike any other because a Christian has Spirit-led life. They produce fruits of faith by the working of the Holy Spirit. This fruit of the Spirit brings an uncommon type of love to the Christian. It is one that simply cannot be found in the works of the flesh. It is only found in the heart of those who trust in Christ as they produce fruits out of freedom from the gospel. A Christian has uncommon love as the Spirit changes their hearts to trust in the Lord and to work out fruits of faith that flow from that trust. It is uncommon love because it comes from freedom, from faith, and from the Spirit's working. Today we see that although our service to God and to others is indeed important, it is not what is most important. There's something greater which makes a Christian so extraordinarily different and gives us uncommon love. In fact, we see today that what makes a Christian's love so extraordinary is the just the opposite of service. Our love is uncommon because our faith is not based on our doing something for God or others. It is based on our receiving service from our God. God himself serves us!

This is what Jesus once said about his own life and mission. "*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.*" Jesus came to serve us. He came in order that we might have words of comfort, hope, and life. What makes a Christian so uncommon is not their extraordinary service, but God's service. Doubtless by the Spirit's working God people will display lives of service. But what makes them truly uncommon is that they love the Word of Christ. They are those who recognize and thirst for the Word of Jesus. Uncommon love comes from listening to the uncommon truths found in the word of our Lord. In his Word we hear how he came to serve us all. In his Word we see how his top priority had always been to rescue us from sin, death, and hell. In his Word we find the uncommon love of a God who would lay down his life to rescue the lost. We hear of the one who could have demanded our service, but instead gives service to us. We hear of how he conquered death and now lives to prepare a place for us, to bring us to live in his kingdom, so that we can sit at his table as guest! His words bring life, peace, joy, and sustain us for eternity! The words he spoke at the house of Martha were no doubt powerful words. They were worth more than anything!

That same God now feeds us with his Word. With word and sacrament he feeds our souls with the gospel, the one thing needful! Jesus told Martha that Mary had chosen what is best, namely, to listen to the word of the Lord. Jesus said that will never be taken away from her. Brothers and sisters in Jesus. Thank God that he has given you opportunity to serve him and one another. Thank God that you get to support gospel ministry together and you get to show love to one another and to your neighbor. But thank God most of all that he has given you the one thing needful. Take time to sit at his feet and be fed. Take time to open the Word of Jesus and listen to it. Stop whatever you are doing each day -as important as it may be- and just be still and be a disciple. What he gives you will never be taken away. It is an uncommon love. And it is yours as you listen to the Son.