

Luke 10:38-42
The Good Portion

Main idea: It's far too easy to serve Jesus while resting in ourselves. It's good to serve Jesus, but much of the time we serve, we do it in such a way that it's more about justifying ourselves. But we can't justify ourselves. We can only rest in Jesus, who justifies us.

Years ago, as I was beginning to pursue ministry, a pastor told me, "Get yourself a hobby." What he meant was this: ministry can become so consuming, so overwhelming at times that it's good to have a hobby, or just some way to take a step back and relax so that you can be refreshed once in awhile in order to not get burnt out and in order to be more effective in ministry. It's not bad advice.

But my problem is that I have too many hobbies. I enjoy doing too many things. I enjoy taking pictures, and tinkering with computers, and making websites, and editing video. And I do many of these things as ministry. I fix your computers. I take your pictures. I update our church website. I edit videos to use as sermon illustrations. Like this one.

[video]

This is a sermon illustration! It may not be a particularly good sermon illustration, but it is a sermon illustration nevertheless! It's illustrating the sermon, and that's what sermon illustrations do! They illustrate the sermon in those places where the sermon needs illustrating. So I hope you enjoyed this sermon illustration!

I spent way too long on that. And I probably made it overly complicated. There was just so much text, and it was flying all over the place, enough to make you dizzy! Instead of illustrating the sermon, it probably distracted from the sermon.

So that advice about getting myself a hobby, I think I took it too far in this case. I probably have too many hobbies. And yet, I do many of these things as I serve you and as I serve God, at least I try to, because, the Bible says, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.

I made that video we just saw in service to God, for this sermon, and yet, it was probably a waste of time to make that video, because it really didn't add anything to this sermon. Did I make it to more to bring glory to God, or to show off my video editing skills? And, being a sinner, and since everything I do is tainted by my sin at least to some degree, how can I ever truly serve God with pure motives? And, can we even serve God? Because the Bible says that God doesn't need us to serve Him.

God is not served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. (Acts 17:25)

So, in a sense, we can't serve God, because we can't add anything to God. We can only be served by God, which was what Jesus did for us when He died for us on the cross.

So maybe I should just stop doing anything and rest in the One who did everything for me! And yet, God doesn't just want us to sit there and do nothing, does He? So should we serve God, or not?

Luke chapter 10, beginning with verse 38.

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

Father, help us to rest and rejoice in You. Help us to be concerned less with the things of this world, and more with Your goodness and glory, falling more and more in love with You. In Jesus's name, Amen.

The beginning of Luke chapter 10 tells us about how Jesus sent out seventy-two of His disciples in pairs as missionaries. They were to be His witnesses in His harvest field. They would cast out demons, heal the sick, and proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God. They were going to prepare the hearts of the people in those towns, so that when Jesus came to their towns, they would be ready to receive Him.

And we talked a few weeks back about how the disciples did that. And how when they came back to Jesus, they rejoiced about the power they had because of the name of Jesus. And Jesus reminded them to rejoice not so much in what they could do for God, but in what God would do for them. Because no matter what awesome things God uses us to do in this life, the best is yet to come! We have immeasurable blessings in heaven because of Jesus Christ.

And now, we read about Jesus going to one of the towns that a pair of disciples went to before Him. We're not told explicitly that this is one of those towns, but it must be, because, as it says all the way back in verse 1, they were sent into every town and place where Jesus Himself was about to go. And since Jesus came to this village after sending them out, and after they came back, it must have been visited first by a pair of disciples.

And so I wonder if that pair of disciples that came to this town when they were sent out actually stayed at Martha's house. Because, we read in this passage that she was eager to welcome Jesus. She wanted Him in her home. And if that's the kind of person she was, she likely did the same for the disciples earlier. I mean, I don't know for sure, but get this: when Jesus sent out

the pairs of disciples, He told them to say something when they entered a house to stay in. Do you remember that? What were they to say? "Peace to this house!"

Now look at verse 41.

But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. (Luke 10:41)

What's the opposite of peace? Anxiousness. Unrest. Being troubled. And so often, we do that to ourselves. We trouble ourselves with all kinds of things, sometimes because we think those things will make us happy, or will make God happy with us. Martha, having Jesus in her home, should have had peace. But instead, she was distracted.

Do you ever get distracted? Now, I'm not talking about a simple lapse in your train of thought, that happens to us all from time to time, but I'm talking about being so distracted by the things of this world that you drift away from following Jesus to the point that that you look back over the last week, year, or even your whole life, and think, "What happened? God, where are You? Why have You let me go through this?"

When that happens, remember this: God is still there, to hold you, to restore you, to bless you beyond measure because of His great love for you through Jesus Christ.

You see, God does not wander away from us; we wander away from Him. But He also draws us back to Himself, that we might experience the fullness of His love.

But oftentimes, we don't even realize when we've wandering away from God. I think that was the case with Martha. She thought she was serving Jesus! She thought she was doing exactly what she should have been doing! But Martha was actually acting a lot like the lawyer we read about last week.

The lawyer asked Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And he sought to justify himself. And now we find that Martha, also, made her relationship with Jesus all about what she could do, or what she thought she should do.

What's on your "should do" list? What's on your list of things to do that you think you absolutely must do in order for God to accept you? Maybe it's a list of sins you need to avoid, like drinking, or swearing, or looking at pornography. Or maybe it's a list of spiritual disciplines you should practice, like reading your Bible and praying, or if you're super-spiritual, fasting.

It's very natural for us to make such a list. After all, we know that we've all fallen short of the glory of God, none of us are good enough for heaven, so we want to try to make ourselves good enough by what we do. So what's on your "should do" list?

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And not only do we make a “should” list for ourselves, but other people constantly tell us what we should do. Your parents tell you what you should do. Your pastor tells you what you should do. The whole world is always telling you what you should do!

So who should you listen to?

Well, Martha’s list at this moment was all about serving Jesus. She thought that the one thing that she and her sister absolutely had to do at that moment was serve. And that’s not such a bad “should do” list, is it? I mean, she was serving Jesus! She was serving God! Isn’t that what we should all do? Isn’t that the thing that should be at the very top of all of our “should do” lists?

Well, Martha’s sister didn’t seem to think so. Or maybe her problem was that she didn’t seem to think. Verse 39.

And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.
(Luke 10:39)

Mary didn’t stop to think, “What should I be doing?” She simply desired to sit at the Lord’s feet and listen! She couldn’t help herself! She felt so loved by Jesus that she simply wanted to be with Him! To see Him! To hear Him! And nothing else in all the world seemed as important as that!

But Martha thought that Mary should have been helping her. Verse 40.

But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."
(Luke 10:40)

So not only do we have things that we think we should be doing, we also think everyone else should be doing what we’re doing! We so elevate our own thoughts and opinions that when someone doesn’t see things our way, or do things our way, we’re most likely to just take our ball and go home, because how dare they not agree with me!

And even when we come together as a church, we often come with all these different ideas of what we should be doing. One person might think the church should be all about serving the poor. Another person might think the church should be all about standing for truth. Another person might think the church should be all about accepting everyone for who they are. And your perspective about what the church should be causes you to expect certain things, do certain things, even tell others in the church what they should be doing.

But the thing is, Jesus told us that the thing that would most define us as His disciples is love. Our love for one another. As a church, we’re to be a group of people united not because we’re just like each other in every way, or because we always see eye to eye, but because we have

one thing in common: Jesus, and because we're united in Him, we love each other, just as God loves us.

Mary experienced that love, and desired to simply sit at the feet of Jesus.

You see, we tend to make life, church, even God Himself about what we can do. But God simply desires that we rest in His love. Verse 40.

One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:42)

Only one thing is necessary. That means that all our serving, all our shoulds, all the law and all the laws we establish for ourselves amount to a bunch of legalism and unprofitable religion...unless we rest in Jesus.

Mary recognized that Jesus is the good portion.

Have you ever seen how a child chooses which piece of cake he wants? Sometimes it's the piece that has the most icing on it. Sometimes it's the piece that looks the most colorful. Sometimes it's the piece with the cool little plastic toy on top, right? Well, no matter the logic that went into selecting the piece, the child selected that piece because they were absolutely convinced that it was the best one. The best piece. The best portion. But to us, it's just another arbitrary piece of the cake.

And sometimes that's how we go about choosing what we do in life. We do things that we think are the best. And we insist that other people do things just like us, because our way is the best way, but in reality, it's just another arbitrary piece of the cake.

You see, Jesus didn't say that Mary had chosen the best portion, as if it was one out of many perfectly decent alternatives, and Jesus just happened to be the better one. Jesus said that Mary had chosen the good portion, because all the other alternatives were not good, and were not pleasing to God.

You see, only God is good. Jesus is the good.

And yet, so often, rather than choosing the good, we chose what we think is better than the good. We choose temporary pleasures. We choose our career. We choose our hobbies. And, given the choice between the two, we often choose doing things for God rather than resting in God, who has done all things for us.

And because we live this way, the good, Jesus Himself, was crucified for us.

So we believe it. And we get baptized, and we start serving in the church, teaching, leading, which are all good things, things we should do. So we start doing more things we think are good. We try to use our gifts to serve the church because we want to bless the church, by singing songs and making sermon illustration videos, but what often happens is that in doing these things, we start to think that God is now accepting us because we're doing the right things, so we're subtly thinking that we're justifying ourselves. And when that happens, we're no longer resting in God; we're resting in ourselves. And even while we're in the midst of that, God is crying out to us, "Only one thing is necessary. Choose the good portion."

Jesus is the good portion. Resting in Him. Being satisfied in Him. Being justified by Him.

Now, am I saying we can't have hobbies? No. Am I saying we shouldn't serve Jesus? Of course not. And of course we should use what gifts God gives us to serve Him and the church. All I'm saying is that it's far too easy to serve Jesus while resting in ourselves. It's good to serve Jesus, but Martha's service was more about justifying herself. She invited Jesus to her house, but she was doing so much that she didn't have time for Jesus.

So I'm not saying that there aren't sins to avoid, and behaviors to practice, what I'm saying is that if we do anything apart from resting in Christ, we've misunderstood our relationship with God. We've turned Christianity into a religion of works! We've sought to justify ourselves! You see, the call to do all to the glory of God isn't just about what you do, but why you do it! And Jesus says, "Only one thing is necessary."

And what is that thing? Sitting at His feet, recognizing that He is Lord, and being loved by Him. Because that can't be taken away from you.

All of the things we get distracted by in this life, whether sins, or our should-do list, even our efforts to try to please God, ourselves, or others, all these things are temporary, and will fade away. But God's love for you will never fade away, and resting in His love is the one thing that will endure.