

Let's pray. **One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.** (Psalm 27:4) Lord help us see you here in your house. Amen.

BUSY CHRISTIANS

There's so much to do! A guest is coming for dinner, and they've got to get ready. Picture them rushing around the house cooking, cleaning, setting dishes, fluffing pillows. What kind of house are you imagining? If you remember the gospel for today, you're imagining the home of Mary and Martha; busy, busy preparing for Jesus. If you remember that today is our mission festival, then you might imagine a Hmong home in Vietnam; busy, busy preparing for a missionary. Or maybe you thought of your own home; busy, busy preparing for... everything!

Did you know that over 130 countries have laws setting the maximum length of the work week? Guess which country isn't on the list. The USA. Americans work long hours, but it's not just work that pulls at your schedule. If your kids or grandkids are involved in anything that adds a ton of hours. We're supposed to be healthy so add a few hours at the gym. Then there's social time. When you picture your home getting ready for dinner, it's no surprise if it's busy. American Christians can relate to the story of Mary and her sister Martha preparing for dinner with Jesus. It's a valuable story because we have so many things to do, so many ways to serve the Lord, and in this story Jesus talks to busy Christians. His words to Mary and Martha show us the most important thing a Christian can do.

Mary and Martha were about to face some huge challenges. Two months after Jesus' visit their brother Lazarus would be called home to heaven. Right after that, they would see Jesus arrested, beaten, and executed. They had no idea what was coming. But Jesus knew, so he stopped at their house to prepare them, to show them the most important thing a Christian can do.

Now I'm going to read this true story, and the end is so important that when we get to Jesus' words at the end I want you to read them with me. They'll be underlined and bolded.

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ 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 the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

⁴¹"Martha, Martha," the LORD answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴²but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

The words of Jesus are the most important part, but in almost every picture of this event the focus is on Mary and Martha and what they're doing. So let's consider those two characters.

MARY

First we need to address a misconception about Mary. Martha is preparing food, making beds, fetching water, and what's Mary doing? Just sitting there. Because we live in a hard-working country, we've been culturally conditioned to have a certain response to people just sitting there. Are you thinking of the same criticism that I am? She's lazy! But that's a misconception. From the very beginning God made people to work. God gave the first man a job, **"The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."** (Genesis 2:15) If Mary was being

lazy Jesus would have no problem scolding her. But she wasn't lazy. She made a choice. And Jesus said it was an excellent choice.

MARTHA

Which leads to a misconception about Martha. If people don't think that Martha's the hardworking sister and Mary's the lazy sister, then they often think that Mary loved Jesus so much, but Martha only cared about the meal. That's a misconception too. There was absolutely nothing wrong with what Martha did for Jesus. He didn't rebuke her for working. In fact, Jesus said, **"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."** (Matthew 20:26) That's what Martha was doing!

Martha served Jesus because she loved Jesus. She knew he had a hard life. One time he described it like this: **"Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."** (Matthew 8:20) Martha was going to make sure that her house was a home for Jesus. Grandparents, you know what I'm talking about. Mary listened to Jesus because she loved him, and Martha served Jesus because she loved him.

But love doesn't necessarily lead to right actions. In John Steinbeck's story *Of Mice and Men*, the character with the biggest heart of all is Lennie Small. He loves animals. He loves them so much that he pets them until they die. Have you ever seen a parent love their kid so much that they never discipline them, and they end up harming the child! We can be full of love, but if we lack understanding our actions do more harm than good.

Martha loved Jesus but there was something she didn't understand. She thought that what I can do for Jesus is more important than hearing what Jesus has done for me. Because she focused on her effort, she was "distracted." She was pulled in many directions at once. Sound familiar? You're pulled to volunteer, and pulled to work extra hours, and pulled to your family, and pulled to a doctor's appointment, and it can all be overwhelming. If we, who love Jesus, ever think that our service is most important, we'll be stretched like Martha.

JESUS

Look how gentle Jesus is with distracted people. **"Martha, Martha."** He's about to change her life. **"You are worried and upset about many things."** He knows there's so much to do! **"But only one thing is needed."** Jesus knew that Martha was about to attend her brother's funeral. For that challenge, she didn't need a clean house or a full pantry. She needed what we need. We need to know that our distracted and haphazard lives have been replaced by Jesus' perfect life. We need to know that Jesus died the death we deserve and he rose again to guarantee our eternal life in heaven. We are not judged by how well we serve Jesus, but by how well he served us. That's something you'll only hear from God's Word. The most important thing a Christian can do is to listen to Jesus.

LISTEN LIKE MARY IN A MARTHA WORLD

We live in a culture that prizes hard work. Our brains are hard-wired to think about our work. So how do we listen like Mary in a Martha world? Well the good news is you're already winning that battle! You could be working right now, but you're here. You could be out to eat right now, but you're here. You could be golfing right now, but you're here, listening to Jesus and preparing to face challenges you don't even know about yet.

HMONG MARYS AND MARTHAS

And you're not alone. Americans work very hard, but Christians all over the world work hard AND listen to Jesus. Christians in Vietnam are busy, busy, busy providing for their families, just like Martha. And they ALSO listen to Jesus, just like Mary. Jesus doesn't walk into their houses with his earthly body. No, he sends missionaries like Pastor Bounkeo Lor to help Hmong pastors learn more about the Savior.

Pastor Lor shared this story about his Hmong associate named Fang: **"Both [Pastor Fang] and his wife worked so hard in their rice field to make sure that they could serve their family and members. He told me, 'Pastor, I am not rich, but I thank God that he gives me the strength to work in my rice field so that I can support my family and do the work that my Lord has entrusted to me.' I remember, one day, after a break from long hours of training, he brought me a well-cooked whole chicken, and said, 'Pastor, my wife and I thank you for sharing the word of God with us. We have nothing to pay you, so we brought you this chicken.' I didn't know what to say, so I split the chicken and ate it with him and the other students. That was one of the most enjoyable moments in my life. I ate the chicken with tears in my heart."**

We could help our brothers and sisters in Vietnam by giving them chickens or building homes and God would be glorified! But those acts of service are not the most important thing. They are the side effects of hearing the good news of Jesus. The Hmong Christians know what's most important. They want to hear from Jesus. Today's mission festival offerings are going toward a partnership between WELS and the Hmong church. We're partnering to build a school for Christian pastors in Hanoi, so more and more people can hear Jesus words. No one knows what challenges the Christians in Vietnam will face, but only one thing is needed. Today we can help give them Jesus.

A CHALLENGE TO LISTEN

No one knows what challenges you will face. But only one thing is needed. I'm thrilled you're here today listening to Jesus, and I'll challenge you to listen even more. Today in your mailboxes you'll find a pamphlet with a list of Bible classes we're offering in September. We have Bible 101 classes, a deep dive into the doctrine of predestination. There's a study of famous Psalms, and another on the book of Hebrews. Plus, there are life groups which meet in people's homes throughout the week. I want you to pick one of those studies right now in your head, and sign up for it after service.

Maybe your listen-to-Jesus challenge is a daily Bible-reading habit. Take ten minutes, open your Bible, and listen to Jesus. It's the most important thing a Christian can do.

MARTHA LISTENS TO JESUS

Two months after Jesus visited Martha, her brother died. Many people came to comfort them, and there was lots to do, meals to prepare, beds to make, water to fetch. And Martha was busy serving when someone said that Jesus was coming. You know what Martha did? She dropped everything and went out to meet him. She knew that what she was doing wasn't as important as what Jesus could do for her. Jesus told her, **"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"** It was a challenge of faith. She replied, **"Yes, Lord."** When Jesus raised her brother from the dead, she saw how right her faith was.

Brothers and sisters, it's alright to work hard in your life. But let there always be an *"also"* in your life, so that you as you work hard you *also* sit at Jesus feet to receive the good news, to receive eternal life, which will never be taken from you. It's the most important thing a Christian can do. Amen.