

If you want to grab your Bibles, turn to Luke, chapter 10. We're going to start in 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.'" Let's pray.**

Heavenly Father, this morning as we come together to worship you, as we come to delight ourselves in you, would you take the Scriptures and the stories and the news we know that may have become familiar to us and would you quicken our hearts? Would you grant fresh sight to our eyes and give us ears to hear your truth, to see your character? Father, I praise you, as I have needed these words this week, you've given them to me and that I can come and hopefully serve my brothers and sisters with them. Would you move in both of our hearts and build us up in Jesus? We need you. We pray in Christ's name, amen.

In rereading this passage this week, one line stuck out to me. **"But Martha was distracted with much serving."** Martha is being hospitable, and her serving is just making her guests at ease. Right? She's clearing the table, she's setting the plates, filling the Brita pitcher, putting the dog outside, getting things together, and there's her sister, not helping an inch.

I don't know if you ever feel this way. The last two weeks for me feel like I've just been eyes down handling what's right in front of me. More often than not it's everything that pops up that I have to handle. Right? It's not just the things I plan for, but it's the other fires to be put out. I'm just chasing those things. At the end of the day, I think, "Well, what did I get done?"

With all the tasks and obligations on our plate, it's easy to define our satisfaction, our daily happiness, with what we get done or how your kids behaved or how other people see you based on how you performed that day. The pace of our world isn't slowing, and so I'm not going to rail against culture in this message. I'd say if we choose task over relationship and distraction over depth every time, that says something about us.

Often I feel like Martha, grumbling in my heart that there's work to be done and not enough help. It's quick to swing between self-pity and pride over how much there is to handle or how unappreciated I am, how other people just don't get it. Anyone else? Yeah? Okay. Instead of living from a place of active rest, a contented dependence in our standing before God in a very real day-to-day sense, we often view God's approval of us the same way we approve ourselves.

If we're honest, we're more concerned with our own approval than God's standard of approval, which is Jesus. So we lie in bed at night thinking about the day maybe one of three ways. We're prideful over how well we did that day, that we're winning or we're productive or we didn't screw up like yesterday, that we did well, or shamed by how we didn't follow through on our resolutions, how we chased comfort, pleasure, or respect as a place to find our value. Third, maybe you lie in bed at night just overwhelmed with the troubles in front of you, praying that sleep would bring you rest that it never does.

I'd say it's tiring being given to the task. It's tiring being given to what's in front of you. It can take the delight just clean out of life, can't it? I'd suggest the Christian life begins like Mary, prizing the good portion given to us, delighting in the object of our faith, Jesus. Even with all the tasks to be done, we want to give him our attention rather than think about how we could earn his affection by things we could do for him. It easily turns to task, where delight turns to duty, and we try and earn affection or acceptance through walking out what God has told us to do.

Think about chores around your house. There are a few ways to do chores. Right? The first one, the optimal one, could be out of love, out of a desire to bless or to be obedient and take care of your spouse, parent, or roommate, you could be proactive and do those chores and think nothing of it and say, "I'm just doing what I should be doing. I want to bless the other person." That'd be top level.

That can quickly downshift, can't it? Be a little bit less happy with, a little bit more frustrated by, a little bit more resentful, and those chores turn into a way to manipulate, a way to get someone to think better of you or to have some kind of reciprocity in doing something good for you. Even worse, it could be you do the chores out of fear just of what might come your way if you don't get it done. That's not a motivation to do things in your home or life.

From delight to task, it's a really subtle drift. Think about how we understand growth in the Christian life. At some point we hear and believe God has done all in Christ. We respond in delight with trust and live in thankful ways to him, but we hone in on how we live, don't we? The dos and the don'ts, the easy way we can measure how we're doing that day.

When we fail, because we will, we're tempted to hide our shame and wallow in guilt. Like Adam and Eve, we'll run *from* God instead of *to* him, like our sin is some kind of surprise to him. We'll try to clean ourselves up by moral action or good thinking. We'll keep distance from him until we feel like we've paid penance for our sin.

This is so backwards from the gospel of grace that saves us. This is making our standard of approval more important than God's standard, which is Jesus. In the midst of being pressed, we can often believe a little less in the goodness of God, believe a little more in our own strength. You might not say it that clearly, but when you look outside of the person and the work of Jesus Christ for your value, your worth, your sense of "okayness," this is what's happening.

Like I said, this drift is subtle. This could happen over years or before lunch. We struggle to trust in the goodness of God, to believe he's really as loving as he says he is and the grace offered to us in Christ is as real as we've been told. Do we not? We wrestle to believe this. It's easier to think Christ got us into faith, that he saved us, but we have to work it out on a daily basis, that we provide for ourselves.

You're probably familiar with the story of Luke 15, about two brothers who tried to provide for themselves and who doubted the goodness of their father. The younger son wants to find his own way, so he demands his inheritance from his *living* dad. He says, "Give me my money. I want to go." He takes off, and he chases pleasure to his last dime, trying to provide happiness for himself. It's only when he's literally dining with pigs does he think, "Man, I could eat better at my dad's house. I should go home."

You see him, and he tries to provide his way back into the house he grew up in by posturing with his own dad. You can hear him practicing what he's going to say, can't you? Because you've said it half a dozen ways when you're trying to clean yourself up. **"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."**

So the prodigal goes home, has his plan in place and his words prepared, and he gets to the edge of the property. You know the father is standing on the porch, sees his boy, and straight runs to him. The boy gets his words out and says, "Father, I have sinned. Treat me as one of your hired servants." The father doesn't even let his little speech sink in. He says, "Get the good clothes for my boy. Get him cleaned up. Get the good wine, the good meat. We're going to celebrate, because my boy is home."

That's one of two sons. Both of them were loved by the father even while their lives look very different. Instead of demanding his share up front, the older brother worked to make his dad proud, staying at home, doing everything he was given, and trying to do it excellently so dad would be proud. The father was proud of his firstborn. He's openhanded with him on everything, but the boy just can't see it.

When his dad celebrates over the return of his young screwup little brother, you can hear him, can't you? "He threw it all away, and I've been here with you. I've done everything you've wanted, even things you didn't ask, hoping you'd be proud of *me*, that you'd celebrate *me*. You've never been good to me like this. There's no way I'm going to go in there and watch you spoil him."

Both of them were providing their own value, doubting in the goodness of the father. Both of them were unaware of their blindness to their father, who sees what and who they are and loves them in spite of what they bring to the table. It's as if Jesus is trying to get across the goodness of God and our inability to see it at every turn. Earlier in Luke in talking about prayer, Jesus also speaks of the character of God, saying:

**"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"**

Parents, when you've wrapped up a gift for your child you know is going to make them lose their mind, you want to watch them open it, don't you? You want to see the look on their face. You want them to tear into that and look at it, and you want to make eye contact, because you want to see them experience your care and your love for them.

Do you know that sense of love right there? Do you know that feeling in your heart? Why do you doubt God has that toward you in Jesus? Why do you doubt God wants to see you that happy? Is your definition of happy in line with God's character, with who he is, or your own provision? In all of this, where are you most of the time? I'd even ask, maybe, where are you this morning? Are you distracted by much serving, tired from the task, like Martha?

Are you shamed and worn out, doubting God could love you like the prodigal? Like the older brother, are you moral and miserable, resentful that God hasn't noticed and appreciated you like he should? I said I think for many of us the Christian life begins like Mary, delighting in the good portion given to us, which is Jesus. It is then a fight to keep trusting in God's Word to us in the gospel, a wrestle between providing for ourselves or believing in his goodness to us in Jesus.

As fall is coming and summer is ending, there are a lot of opportunities for us to daily shift the eyes of our heart and our focus off of God's goodness in Christ. There are hourly opportunities for us to be defined by our task list, our circumstances, our hurts, our desires, ourselves. I want to take this opportunity, this next little bit, to remind you of the good portion you have: Jesus.

If you're here today and you don't know Jesus, if you say, "I'm an unbeliever," what I'm about to walk through just as clearly as I can make it is what we call the good news or the gospel of Christ. This is not just a story, and it's not just a framework to make sense of things, because when the Holy Spirit allows a man or woman to see the good news of Jesus, to truly see and hear, it changes a man or a woman irrevocably for life.

If you're a believer and you're in the room, this is not a chance for you to coast or to check out or to think you have this, that you're saved and so you can go on to bigger or deeper things. You don't get past this. Ask the Lord for grace, for the good portion, that he would give you himself. God created mankind to delight in himself. He gave mankind a job, a place to live, and he promised to provide for them.

Adam and Eve, our first parents, in the garden were tempted and distrusted what God had said. They chose to provide for themselves, doubting God's goodness. The Bible calls that sin, which is not just an action but an attitude and state of the heart, which means it's not just what you do but who you are. Adam and Eve's sin spread to every human, to you and to me. We're born with sick hearts that are not simply capable of wrong but desire wrong instead of the truly good we were made to know.

We're in need of healing, and we look for our identity, acceptance, and rest in every place, in everyone we trust, taking the good things God has created and making them ultimate things, trusting them as the source of our okayness. Everything we trust that is not him will betray us. We crush people with expectations. We enslave ourselves to acceptance, comfort, or distraction. Life has been managing expectations, wrestling with the desire for completeness that seems promised at every turn yet missing.

We're in need of help. With sick hearts we are incapable of seeing rightly. That's where God has moved on our behalf. With sick hearts we're incapable of mending the relationship between God and us, because we can never clean ourselves up enough or have the right to reach his level. So he came to ours. God the Father sent God the Son to complete the rescue plan of God's children.

That might sound like an action plot, like a summer blockbuster, but realize it's the most daring rescue known to man, and you and I have paid good money to see the echoes of it in film and literature for a long time. Where in many of those movies we identify with the hero of the story, the one doing the rescue, in truth you and I are the ones locked up with the clock ticking, but we struggle to identify with the weakness in a story like that, which means before we can see the goodness of our delivery, of Christ's person and work, we have to see the darkness of our need.

If your understanding of sin is small, then you're going to take Jesus lightly. If it's just bad things you do sometimes, just darkness that creeps out of you and not understanding the desire for those bad things

comes from inside of you, you won't see the need for salvation from yourself. This was Lee's message last weekend in Matthew 15. Out of the heart come things that defile a man and condemn him. Sin is not just something you do, but it's what we're born into.

If you don't realize you're incapable of knowing and doing true good, then the bad you're bent toward will be the best you'll ever know. It's an empty, thin husk of which you were made to delight in. As one author puts it, we are more flawed and sinful than we ever dared believe, yet we are more loved and accepted than we ever dared hope at the same time, because he came to our level.

Christ Jesus, God in the flesh, became like us so he might know our weakness, our pain, and our circumstance. (Hebrews 2.) He resisted every temptation we have embraced. (Hebrews 4.) He obeyed God the Father perfectly, earning acceptance for us so we could quit trying to earn it. (Galatians 3.) He came that we might know the Father like he does (John 17) and experience the relationship we were made to delight in. (First Peter 2.)

He knew the cost of our life was his death. (John 13.) His obedience of death on a cross glorified God in a way we could never match. (Philippians 2.) His broken body and shed blood covered our sins and our sick hearts before God. (Colossians 2.) His resurrection proved the power of God over death and brought about healing for those who believe. (First Corinthians 15.)

Can I tell you this is while we were far from God? This is while we were enemies of God. (Romans 5.) For the man or woman who believes in Christ, the gift of grace is forgiveness, to be reborn, to be given a new heart and, not only be able to recognize what is truly good, but to desire it. (Romans 6.) Hear Jesus. **"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"**

God says, **"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."** The writer of the book of Hebrews adds, **"Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin,"** which means distracted and weary hearts are welcome to delight in Jesus. Prodigals are never...hear me...never beyond grace, the Father having made his love known in Jesus. Older brothers, we are welcome to trust in God. We can't earn his love any more than he has given us in its fullness in Christ.

In Christ we have been healed and are being healed. In Christ we have been delivered and are being delivered. I ask you this morning what are you trusting in for provision or hope other than the goodness of God in Christ toward you? Do you believe the goodness of the Father applies to you? Could I ask you a simpler question? Do you believe he's truly good?

Having once believed God's grace was big enough to cover your sins and bring you home, has distraction turned you to task, trying to define your satisfaction and value from what you can do, or has doubt taken you away from believing his goodness? Do you think your sins are stronger than the blood of Christ? Do you think they're stronger than the empty tomb?

Hear Jesus again. **"Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."** **"Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."** If you're here and you don't believe in Jesus, you need to know the Bible is clear that he is the only way to true life. To face him and choose your own provision has terrible consequences.

To face him and see him, to believe in him is to enter into true joy. It's the difference between being told how honey tastes and delighting in its sweetness. If you want to know him, ask God to reveal himself to you. Say, "Let me see Jesus." Take one of those black Bibles in front of you if you don't have it, and suspend out.

Read the gospel of John. Read the book of Ephesians. Read the book of Romans. Look at Jesus and dare to believe you could be that loved and that he's that good. Do you want to talk with someone? We'll be in the back at the end of the service during worship if you want to pray with somebody. Maybe grab who brought you here.

Christian, you who have this hope in you, would you try and earn what Christ died to bring and now lives to perfect in you? Where do you doubt God's goodness towards you in Christ? Are you living under your own standard of approval or his? Hear now the apostle Paul. **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for the gift of your standard of approval, which is Jesus. I thank you because it is so freeing to those who would want to earn it like me, and it's so freeing for those who would want to try and provide for themselves by running away from you. Yet you pull us to yourself, you allow us to see Jesus, and you let us delight in what is truly good and our souls are designed to know.

Father, for those in the room who don't know you, would you grant eyes to see and ears to hear, and would you reveal the beauty of Christ? For those in the room who know you, who have put their worth in other things besides you either for years or this morning, Father, would you grant them eyes to see you, to repent, and to love you?

Lord, may our response in worship be to our vision of your character and your beauty and your goodness. May we trust you with all of our worries and anxieties and believe you're good. We pray in Christ's name, amen.

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