

The Good Part

We are told in an earlier chapter of this Book of Luke that Jesus knew that the time was drawing near for Him to suffer and to die on a cross, and because of that, He had set His face towards Jerusalem and had begun to travel in that direction.

He was not in a hurry, because that time of His suffering had already been set even long before the foundations of the earth had been laid. It would be at the time of that year's Passover celebration. But in the meantime, He had many things to accomplish along His way, diseases to be healed, demons to be driven out of people, disciples to train and be sent out, and many, many other things to do, but all in their right order and time.

And here in today's text, we find Jesus and His disciples arriving in the Village of Bethany, a village very near to Jerusalem where some of His dearest of friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived.

Turn with me to Luke chapter 10, and read along beginning in verse 38,

³⁸Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. ³⁹And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me." ⁴¹And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴²But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

As I follow along with the Lord Jesus on His journey through the towns and villages, preaching and teaching and healing the sick, I need always to remind myself that none of the events that we read about within these scriptures occur by happenstance. It's clear from these words that God the Father had a very specific and very organized plan that He was carrying forward through the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

And in reading these words, I'm reminded of a song writer who some years ago, wrote a popular song about God, a song that envisioned God as being the "Great Director" of a grand symphony that's taking place on the earth at every

moment of every day, a symphony in which all the people of the earth are called to join in and to play a part.

And curiously, that word picture, in many ways, is a very good one. As I mentioned a moment ago, we know from these scriptures and even from our own experiences as Christians that God truly is "Sovereign" and is "Providential", and that the matters of life were determined and set into motion for us even long before the foundations of the earth were ever laid.

Some of my favorite scriptures that tell about God's plans and His watchcare over us are given to us in the Book of Acts, chapter 17. Listen,

26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'
(Acts 17:26-28)

Folks, much of who you and I are today was set into motion by God, our creator, long before the earth came into being. And similar words to these can be found all throughout these scriptures, all telling us that God truly is sovereign and He is providential, and that he guides and directs the activities and pathways of man.

We love to quote Billy Graham as saying that "God has a plan for your life." But long before Billy Graham began to quote those words, God spoke those same words through the Prophet Jeremiah in chapter 29 verse 11.

Folks, God really does have a plan for all the days of our lives, long before we reach those days when we actually live them. He has a purpose and a pathway for us to walk, and He wants us to walk in that pathway. And He wants to guide and direct our steps.

All that remains is for us to submit our "free will" nature to Him. We're told in Proverbs 3 to,

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

God truly is the “Great Director” of all that takes place on the earth, but it is only if and as we become willing to take that full step of surrendering our “free will” to Him and His direction, acknowledging Him not only as our Savior but also as our Lord, that He is able to “direct our paths”.

I know that such words seem strange, that we can actually thwart the will and direction of Almighty God, but it is true. He has given us that privilege, to go off in the wrong direction, saying and doing and acting the way we choose, being a hindrance to His better plan and purpose.

Think about this analogy for a moment folks. Right at this very moment across our world, men and women are arguing and fussing and saying awful things to each other. Do we for a moment think that those are the things that God intends for them or us to say? Not at all!

And what about the last time that you said something ugly and unkind to someone. Did God want you to say those words, or did He have other words that you were supposed to say?

The truth is, our salvation brought with it an already well defined plan and a proper way to handle all the matters of life. We need to do nothing else except to ask God for the part that He has written out for us, and then get about following it.

And these truths are so very well illustrated for us in this scripture passage that we are studying here today. Here in this circumstance involving these two dear women, Mary and Martha, we see God's foreordained plan and purpose moving forward. God had a role for each of them to follow. Mary immediately recognized her role and immediately sat down at the feet of Jesus to learn His teachings and to worship Him with her obedience.

And just like Mary, Martha was also probably supposed to sit at Jesus' feet. But Martha's natural tendency was to be busy with more practical matters, like cooking food and serving the guests.

And those tendencies are not necessarily wrong all of the time. On some occasions, those things may have been exactly what God had designed for her to do.

The key to knowing when we are to do certain things is to always keep our attention on the one who is directing our path. Then we will know.

And that was true for Martha. She was looking down at the work to be done and not up at the "Great Director" who was directing her path.

And here also, Martha showed another of her human tendencies, that of being judgmental and that of wanting to decide what other people should be doing. Verse 40,

⁴⁰But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me." (Luke 10:40)

Note here also, a very subtle, but very serious pitfall, that of actually being judgmental towards God, blaming, accusing Him of being unrighteous, accusing the very epitome of love itself of not caring.

She said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?"

That is a common snare that we get caught in, that of blaming God for the misfortunes that befall us. We say to Him, "You are God. You could and should have done something about my situation, but you didn't. Now, I am going to hold you accountable! Now I am going to be angry at you."

And folks, I have heard very sincere Preachers and Counselors saying that it is alright to be angry at God, that He understands and sympathizes with our suffering. And maybe, in some circumstances that might be okay. But may I caution us to take great care in being angry at God. We do not have the wisdom within us, nor do we have the authority to judge our righteous and holy God.

And there is no greater love, no greater caring than that of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

When something goes amiss, you and I need to look first within our own souls. Most often, that is where we will find the things that went wrong.

Here with Martha, it seems that she let some of her inborn personality traits get her frustrated and cause her words to get out of hand.

Again, perhaps cooking and serving was a natural ability of Martha, put into her at birth by God as a common grace to befit her for the many needs and demands of daily life. And those common graces are good. But Martha failed to accept that the same common grace may not have been given to her sister Mary.

And beyond that, there is a time and a place for all things, and perhaps this was a time when those common matters needed simply to be set aside.

But hidden even deeper within this incident is the revelation from God that as we begin to truly surrender our lives over to Him, He will change us and He will begin to put new attitudes and new behaviors within us, attitudes and behaviors that are different and that go beyond and supersede our natural inborn ways and abilities.

In our “New Birth” in Christ, as we receive His Spirit, His Spirit will bring with Him new and different special “Gifts” and “Fruits” that we never had before. And with those new Spiritual gifts and fruits, we will desire things and we will do new things that we never did before.

Those special gifts are spoken about in the Book of Romans chapter 12 and in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and in Ephesians chapter 4. There God tells us about some very special “ gifts” from the Holy Spirit that He spreads abroad in the hearts of people who trust in Him as Savior and Lord.

And in His explanation of them, God emphasizes that not all people have the same “Spiritual gifts” and that we must not expect, and demand that every person have the same gifts that we or that someone else has.

Yes, many of us might fulfill some of the same types of roles, but each with a unique and different manner and way of going about it.

Listen to these words given in Romans 12,

³For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and

individually members of one another. ⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. (Romans 12:3-8)

Again, at that very moment that you and I received Christ as our Savior, everything within us changed. We became new and different creatures. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we're told,

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (1 Corinthians 5:17)

These words don't imply that the personality we had before our salvation will be taken out of us. We know from experience that that does not take place. What does happen is that a new heart and a new Spirit are put into us and that as we yield our spirit to God's new Spirit within us, we then begin to act very differently.

But with that being said, we know also that our old spirit does not give up easily. Oftentimes, our old tendencies and old ways draw us down old familiar paths and create problems for us and others around us.

And again, that seems likely to be what was taking place here with Martha, her old natural tendencies causing her to be judgmental and demanding of both Mary and of Jesus.

But our responsibility, and yes, our struggle is to give up on any of our old natural tendencies and abilities that are no longer profitable, and to look for the new "Spiritual Gifts" and abilities that God has imputed into us.

Before that moment when Mary first received Jesus as Her Savior and Lord, she might never have been a humble learner who would sit at a teacher's feet. But now here, we can see the working of the Holy Spirit and Mary giving herself over to what Jesus calls, "the good part". In verse 42, Jesus said that "Mary has chosen that good part and it will not be taken from her."

But what about Martha's part? Do these words mean that Martha was not doing a "good part"? Perhaps, but perhaps not, we don't know for sure, but we do know from Jesus' gentle rebuke that Martha should not have been worrying about all the things that frustrated her and made her complain.

Perhaps also, Jesus was saying to Martha that she was getting the “doing” part of her new calling ahead of one of the more necessary preparatory parts, that of first sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning to simply “be”.

And no doubt, this is also a clear message for you and me, that too quickly we get about the “doings” of life, and that can be harmful if we have not first learned how to sit quietly at the feet of Jesus and learn simply to “be” in Him.

But what about all of those many needful things like food preparation and serving? Folks, a truth that you and I must grasp and hold onto is that God really does know ahead of time all the many things that need to be done, from the sitting at the feet of Jesus to the cooking and the serving.

And if God can create the world with only a spoken command of His voice, He can surely make all the arrangements you and I will need to accomplish each one of the needful things of daily life.

Yes, we have kids to tend to and food to cook and the house to clean and baseball and football games to go to, and the car needs repair and we also have eight solid hours of work to do each day to earn a living, but . . . we also have plenty of time to sit at the feet of Jesus.

We need to quit saying that we do not have the time. God is able to make time within your busy schedule for Him if you want Him to be there.

And consider this, if you don't do that, and especially if you don't intentionally set aside time for devotions with your family, you are also robbing them of some of their precious time of sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Here in this passage, Martha, unknowingly was about to rob Mary of her precious time of sitting at the feet of Jesus. If Martha had of forced her own opinions upon Mary, Mary might have gotten up and gone into the kitchen, missing out on what Jesus calls “the good part”.

Before we close, let me ask, “Are we robbing ourselves and are we robbing our loved ones of those precious, precious moments with Christ, the “good part”?”

Some years ago, God provoked my heart to consider these things. He brought to mind the scriptures that told me to “Train up a child in the way He should go

and when he is old he will not depart from it". And God brought me the verse in Ephesians where I am told to continually "shower" my wife with the word of God. And I decided that I had no choice but to figure out a way to make it happen.

I began getting up earlier each day, providing time for my own private devotions with the Lord, and then scheduling a time for a devotion and prayer with my wife and children. And it was the right thing, "the good part", as Jesus put it, for us to do and it has blessed our family beyond measure.

So yes, these words that Jesus spoke to Martha are for you and for me. Folks, before we get about the busy and needful things of the day, we must first get about the "good part" of sitting at the feet of Jesus. He will surely provide us time for all of it.

Listen to these precious words as we close.

⁴¹And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. ⁴²But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41)

Let's pray.