



What Honors Jesus?

Luke Series #31

Luke 10:38-42

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For me, dating in high school was a disaster and first dates were especially disastrous. (Things became much better in college when I met my wife.) I remember a first date when I really wanted to impress a girl and took her to the most expensive restaurant I could afford as a high school student. This restaurant went by the simple yet profound name of “Mr. Steak.” I loved Mr. Steak and thought it was the best. Our family went there all the time for birthdays and celebrations; with six kids in our family we went there nearly every other month.

Whenever we went to Mr. Steak, we always ordered steak. I didn’t even realize there was anything else on the menu until I took this girl there and told her, “You can order anything you want on the menu.” She didn’t order a steak but ordered a sandwich instead. In my heart, I was offended. I had taken her out for a nice meal and was willing to pay upwards of \$10 yet she didn’t even order a steak at Mr. Steak.

I understood why after I actually talked to her and found out that her family owned the local meat locker. She often had access to steak of much better quality than that of Mr. Steak. I thought I was honoring her but she would have been more honored to go to Red Lobster. Our date was centered around me and what I wanted.

If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, you want to honor Him. There are all kinds of things we do—activities and ministries—that we believe will honor Jesus. However, there is the very real possibility we could be doing things that don’t honor Jesus as they ought. They could really be about honoring ourselves. The question I want to consider in Luke 10:38-42 is: “What honors Jesus?” God’s Word says:

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. 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.” ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Heavenly Father, this is Your Word and we thank You for it. I thank You that “... *the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*” (1 Corinthians 1:18). Holy Spirit, would You work powerfully in us and give me a gift of utterance to speak this Word truthfully as it ought to be spoken? Would You give us spiritual eyes to see, spiritual ears to hear, spiritual hearts to understand and wills to respond to Your Word? We ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Remember where we are in the course of Luke’s account of Jesus’ story. We are in a section of the book of Luke that tells of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. It began in Luke 9:51, “*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*” He is absolutely focused on getting to Jerusalem and accomplishing His mission to seek and save the lost. He has been seeking the lost and we have seen that the crowds often reject Him. But those who have a humble heart—including many in humble circumstances—are receiving Him. He has been seeking the lost and now He is going to Jerusalem to accomplish salvation and redemption for all who believe.

As Jesus goes on His mission, He calls men and women to join Him and become His disciples. Through this, we learn that a disciple is:

- One who has counted the cost of following Jesus (Luke 9:57-62).
- One who has embraced the message of the Kingdom, so much so that he or she is sharing that message with others (Luke 10:1).
- Unlike the lawyer, not one who is self-justifying (Luke 10:29).
- One who rejoices that their name is written in heaven (Luke 10:20).
- One who wants more of Jesus’ revelation about Himself and His Kingdom (Luke 10:21).
- A man or woman who humbly but boldly presses into Christ and wants more of Him.

In our text, Luke reminds us that Jesus is on His way with His disciples: “...*they went on their way*” (Luke 10:38). They enter a certain village which is most likely Bethany because Mary and Martha lived there with their brother Lazarus. They were very close to Jesus and often ministered to His basic needs of food and a place to stay by welcoming Jesus and His disciples into their home. We know that Jesus was ministered to by their hospitality and loved them dearly. John tells us “*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus*” (John 11:5). This verse is found within the story of Lazarus’ death and Jesus raising him from the dead. When the report comes to Jesus of Lazarus’ illness, it says, “*Lord, he whom you love is ill*” (John 11:3).

In our text, we see Martha’s love for Jesus in action as she welcomes Jesus into her house. What a gift it is to have the ability to bring someone into your home and make them feel welcome. In the church, we call this the gift of hospitality. Many of you have this gift, particularly many of the women in our

church. It takes a woman's touch because hospitality for guys can amount to serving a 'Hot Pocket' on a paper plate.

Martha had the gift of hospitality down to an exact science. She could probably picture an elegantly set table in her mind, had a sixth sense about the timing of every course of a meal and knew how to anticipate and meet every need of her guests before they said anything. She is in rare form in this story and firing on all hospitable cylinders. Why shouldn't she be? Doesn't Jesus deserve her best?

It was going quite well but there was a problem. That lazy sister of hers was sitting there while Martha did all the work. It would have been one thing if Mary was sitting and doing something productive but she was simply sitting and listening to Jesus. Can you hear what Martha is thinking? "Mary, I want to listen to Jesus also but there is a lot of stuff to do first. Work now; rest and listen later."

Clearly, these sisters were very different from one another. Martha was probably the oldest—a 'do-er', take-charge, type-A personality. She had taken the initiative to host in her home. Mary was more contemplative; more of a thinker and feeler than a do-er. She could become lost in conversation or in her own thought. Joanna Weaver puts it this way in her book, [Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World](#):

Mary's bent was to meander through life, pausing to smell the roses.
Martha was more likely to pick the roses, quickly cut the stems at an angle
and arrange them in a vase with baby's breath and ferns.

These sisters were different, as all siblings are, but if we simply chalk up their different responses to Jesus to birth order or personality type, we will miss what God intends for us to learn from this text. Whether we can relate better to Martha or to Mary, I believe the Holy Spirit can use this passage of Scripture to confront each one of us on how we relate to Jesus and what it is that truly honors Him.

What honors Jesus? Both of these women were disciples of Christ and thought they were honoring Him. Yet only one was honoring Him the way He wanted to be honored. The other was sure that she was but was not. Friends, that is scary! It means there is a real possibility that we who are Jesus' disciples could do the very same thing. We could be relating to Jesus in a way that we are convinced honors Him when in fact it does not bring Him the greatest honor or bring us the greatest joy as His disciples.

What honors Jesus? Let's see if we can find out by observing these two sisters more closely, specifically observing what was going on in the heart of each.

Martha's Heart

We shouldn't be too hard on Martha because we know she loves Jesus and clearly wants to serve Him. She is thinking about Him but not exclusively or entirely. Look at what Luke tells us about her heart-disposition in Luke 10:40: *"But Martha was distracted with much serving."* It appears that Martha is making a big too-do about this dinner party, pulling out all the stops and making it more elaborate than it needs to be.

I think there is a lesson for us here: Christian hospitality need not be extravagant and keeping it simple is often best. Otherwise, stuff becomes the focus. Whether simple or elegant, folk or fine, where is your focus? What are you attending to and where is your heart's attention?

Martha's attention is divided; she is distracted. The word Luke uses here for *"divided"* can mean "to be pulled away" or even "dragged away." It is as if in part of her heart, Martha wants to be right next to Mary listening to Jesus. But she can't stop thinking about all the details. Stuff is winning the battle for her heart.

Jesus sees the state of Martha's heart. Look what He says to her, *"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things"* (Luke 10:41). She is not just worried and upset about the details of the meal but about many things. "Is the economy going to get any better? The kids start school this week and I haven't gotten all their supplies yet. My synagogue has been painted an awful shade of green. I don't understand why my husband is so moody all the time. I don't understand Jesus sometimes. Why is He going to Jerusalem when He must know He could be killed?"

It sounds like the seed that fell among the thorns in Jesus' parable of the Sower in Luke 8. Do you remember Jesus' assessment of this seed? He said:

"And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature" (Luke 8:14).

Luke is telling us that Martha could be there at Jesus' feet listening to His teaching but she is allowing the cares of her life to choke out His Word. Going her own way is the problem. It is not that she is not one of Jesus' disciples. Rather, the problem is that she has gotten off of the path of discipleship and wants to pull Jesus onto her path. You can hear this in her complaint to Jesus: *"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me"* (Luke 10:40). Martha is focused on herself. She thinks she is honoring Jesus but is actually dishonoring Him in at least three ways:

1. She questions whether Jesus cares. Maybe you can hear your own voice in hers. "Jesus, don't you care that my kids don't listen to me; that nobody notices my extra effort at work; that I am

- struggling to keep myself pure while all my friends are hooking up; that I serve every week in children's ministry while so many others do nothing?"
2. She assumes He is on her side. She is right, has it figured out and Jesus needs to approve her agenda. "Jesus, here is my wonderful plan for my life. If You love me, I'm sure You will get on board with me."
 3. She dishonors Jesus by demanding that He responds as she requests. She is in the driver's seat, setting the agenda and Jesus needs to get with the program. "Jesus, get my sister over here to give me a hand."

Martha asked for help from Jesus and will get help. She thought she was serving Him but Jesus is about to serve her because He loves her. Don't read this story and think "Jesus loves Mary more than Martha. Look at Mary at His feet, drinking in His Word. Martha is so distracted and should have known better." Friends, we are all like Martha—*"anxious and troubled about many things."* Jesus doesn't love us more when we are like Mary and we do not need Him more when we are like Martha. We need Him 100 percent of the time.

He lovingly corrects her. Look at His words: *"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things"* (Luke 10:41). He identifies her sin of being fearful instead of trusting; being angry and focused on things that are temporary rather than eternal. An idol is anything we crave or desire above God—something created rather than the Creator. Jesus identifies Martha's idols: control, perfectionism, self and pride. Martha is a disciple with a distracted heart.

Mary's Heart

Martha's response to Jesus does not honor Him and He lovingly corrects it. But Mary's response and heart does honor Him. Look at how Jesus identifies it: *"...but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her"* (Luke 10:42). While Martha is frantically working on all the logistics of the event, Mary is quietly sitting at Jesus' feet. Her position at His feet reveals her submission to Jesus and her humility. It is the position of a disciple learning at the feet of her Master.

It was shocking for a woman to assume the place of a disciple in the first century. The rabbis would not allow it. So we see in Mary a beautiful combination of humble submission to Jesus coupled with a bold pressing in toward Jesus, eager to feed on His Word. What a stunning picture of true discipleship!

Mary understood what Jesus had said in Luke 10:21-24:

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children [Mary was like a child before Jesus]; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

I think Mary heard that and by God's grace understood it. Now she wants more of her heavenly Father God through her Savior Jesus Christ. She is at His feet, feasting on the banquet He is opening to her. There is a sense of urgency because Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem. The time is drawing near for Jesus to accomplish the redemption for all His people. She doesn't have much longer to feast before Him and draw from her Lord and Savior. She chooses "...*the good portion*" (Luke 10:42), the juiciest steak.

Imagine if you were the first to a banquet and the host told you, "Everything is spread before you. You may take whatever you like of the best—the good portion." Jesus is the good portion. This is a reflection of a phrase in the Psalms of the Old Testament.

*The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. (Psalm 16:5-6)*

*One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4 ESV)*

*Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:25-26 ESV)*

Jesus is the good portion I get and I have Him forever. So Jesus says to Martha, "Don't take Mary's plate or pull her away from the feast her Lord has spread for her. I won't let anyone come between Me and My disciple—the one who rests her soul in Me."

What honors Jesus? Resting in Him as Lord, depending on Him, relying on Him, entrusting myself to Him, having faith in Him, devoting myself to Him, desiring Him and finding satisfaction in Him alone. Our text says, "*Mary has chosen*" (Luke 10:42). What do we do when we choose something? Do

we simply line up options A and B, look at the pluses and minuses, and in a sterile way say, “Option A is better”? Certainly our intellect is involved. But when we choose something, we choose what we love, want and desire because it will bring us pleasure, joy and satisfaction. We choose that which thrills our soul. Martha welcomed Jesus into her home but Mary welcomed Jesus into her heart, soul, self and life.

This reminds me of John Calvin’s motto—pictured simply as a hand holding out a heart. “My heart I give to Thee, Oh Lord, promptly and sincerely.” Lord, I give you my heart and soul. I live to worship You alone.

Friend, if that is not where you are, if you don’t know what it means to want Jesus above all things—to desire Him more than your sin, rebellion and the trespasses you are dead in and that condemn you—then I urge you to look to Jesus today. Look to Him as your Savior and as the One Who is desirable because He has paid for your sins with His precious blood and offers forgiveness to all who would simply come to Him in childlike faith. Come to His feet. Come to the foot of His cross, repent, turn from sin and embrace Him by faith to know the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Application

If God has done that work in your life then you are one of His disciples and want to have a ‘Mary’ heart. The problem is that we live in a chaotic, ‘Martha’ world with all kinds of stuff happening. Our calendars are hideous with appointment on top of appointment. There are demands waiting to distract us all the time. What do we need to do, know and believe in order to have a Mary heart in a Martha world?

I’m going to suggest we take a cue from one of my heroes—the survivalist Bear Grylls. If you dropped Bear down into the middle of a dense forest, the first things he would do is get to a high place for a panoramic view of where he is, where he has been and where he is going. I think we should do this in regard to our place in salvation history and see what God is doing in redemption. Where do we stand on the timeline of redemption? I want to look back, look at where we are and look forward.

1. **Look back at the unchanging character of God.** Did you note in this passage that Jesus is referred to as “Lord” three times? All of the Gospel writers refer to Jesus as Lord but Luke is especially fond of that designation for Jesus. If you continue reading in the book of Acts, it is important to note that Jesus is called “Lord” or “Lord Jesus.” On the way to Damascus, Paul says, “*Who are you, Lord?*” (Acts 9:5). Luke loves to point to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Our passage challenges us to ask if we are truly honoring Him as Lord. Do we understand, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*” (Hebrews 13:8)? He is One with the Father and They as one God created the heavens and the earth. Our God is eternal, unchanging,

sovereign, compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in covenant-keeping love (Jonah 4:2). Regardless of the anxieties and distractions around us, He will never leave or forsake us.

2. **Look down at our present circumstances and understand that we are reaping the unending benefits of the cross.** What Jesus accomplished at the cross happened 2,000 years ago and—by God’s grace—may have been applied to your life 10 or more years ago. The cross still stands at the center point of history. Its power and effects are a present reality for the child of God. We stand in grace, for God’s grace to us through Jesus Christ is relentless. Knowing we belong to Him is our greatest comfort and joy in the midst of uncertain and trying circumstances. Last week we said together that He is “our only comfort in life and in death...”

What is going to give me comfort? There are all kinds of things going on in my life, pulling for my attention. Even if my schedule isn’t full, there are all kinds of other things that can draw my attention. I need comfort and by God’s grace, this is my comfort: I am not my own but I belong to my Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for every one of my sins. Don’t take this the wrong way, but you cannot out sin His grace and there is nothing so awful that God is not able to forgive because of what Jesus has done. He has fully paid for all my sins and set me free from the tyranny of the devil. I don’t have to sin anymore. He watches over my life in such a crazy, detailed way that not a hair can fall from my head apart from His will (Matthew 10:30). He is working out all things for my eternal good (Romans 8:28). That doesn’t change and I experience that now in the midst of turbulence.

3. **Look ahead to the unfathomable quality of heaven.** When I say we need to have hope in heaven, I don’t just mean heaven. We are not merely going to strum on harps in the clouds for a while. There will be a new heaven and earth where Jesus will redeem everything and we will live in relationship with our Creator in the way we were supposed to in the very beginning (2 Peter 3:13). That was His goal. There will be no more sin, temptation, sorrow, loss, frustration, disappointment or misunderstanding and we will have rest (Revelation 21:1-8). God’s goal in creation was rest. He worked six days and on the seventh, rested (Genesis 2:1-3).

This is Jesus’ call of discipleship: “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). After He paid for our sins on Calvary and rose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father. The writer of Hebrews tells us, “*...there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God*” (Hebrews 4:9). On that day we will have unhindered communication with our Savior, our hearts will be quieted in His presence and we will pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) because the One we pray to will be standing before us.

I love what Paul Miller says in [A Praying Life](#) about having that kind of communion with God right now. He says, “Learning to pray doesn’t offer us a less busy life; it offers us a less busy heart. In the midst of outer busyness [by God’s grace] we can develop an inner quiet.” Friends, how counter-cultural is that? Can you imagine if we—by God’s grace and through the work of the Holy Spirit—started living that

way? What kind of questions would our friends and neighbors ask us? “How can you be so at peace with everything going on in your life?” Is there a better opening for the gospel than that? “I belong to my Savior, Jesus Christ and am resting in Him. That is how I can have peace.”

I want to give you one caution as we close: There is a way to respond to this message in a way that is very “Martha.” You could hear this and think, “I’ve got it. I need to be more restful and have more communion with God. I need to reorganize my life, prioritize a few things so my ducks can be in a row and I can fit in my time with God.”

(I feel bad for Martha because I keep using her name as if she is the most negative person in the Bible. The good news for Martha is that she did get it and made a wonderful profession of faith in Jesus.)

It is possible that time for communion and fellowship with God is missing and you do need to carve out time for it. I don’t know if anything can be removed from your plate, nor guarantee that more will not be added to it. Nor do I think of that as the main application of this message. At the end of the day, Christianity is not about what we are doing for Jesus but about what He has done and continues to do for us. This message is about resting in that truth as His child. It is about making Jesus’ mission our number one mission in all that we do, resting in Him, communing with Him from moment to moment. We can rest in Him even as we busily navigate appointments and obligations.

Friends, you can be at rest right now within your soul. In the midst of all the activity around you that threatens to distract and cause anxiety, you can have peace and be at rest like a child resting in her father’s arms. When your greatest joy is found in Christ, though the storms of life rage around you, you can say, “It is well with soul because God has won and Christ has prevailed! That is all I need for it is the good portion. Praise God, it will never be taken away from me.”

Father God, we confess we are prone to distraction and thinking we are doing something for You rather than resting in what Jesus has done for us. We thank You for the gracious work You do in pointing out our idols. Holy Spirit, we pray You would help us smash those idols and replace our desire for created things with a greater, stronger and more passionate desire for our Savior. I pray that this week You would help us rest in Jesus and truly mean it when we say, “It is well with my soul.” We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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