

A TIME TO BE SELFISH – LUKE 10:38-42

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³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She 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, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Picture the story. A good friend of yours has just informed you that he's going to swing by your house for supper. This is a friend that is always on the road working, so you're glad for any opportunity to see him. You plan out the menu, clean up the house, make the preparations. Finally the day arrives, you welcome your friend into your home, invite him to sit down and make himself comfortable, while you finish up some of the last minute details. But there were a few more last minute details than you were expecting, so you look for your sister to help you. After looking everywhere in the house, you find her relaxing with your guest of honor. Instead of quietly whispering to your sister, you announce to your friend that you still need some help, and he should make your sister help out. But then he rebukes you! The person who's been preparing the meal, not the one who's just sitting there. It just doesn't seem fair.

While that's a summary of the gospel account from this morning, how often could we see similar scenarios playing out in our own lives? Martha showed some selfishness in wanting her sister's help. Just like I show my selfish tendencies when I'm washing dishes and get upset that nobody's helping me. What is worse is being called out for that selfishness, a selfishness that is often attached with a prideful, sinful attitude. But just to be clear, it wasn't Martha's selfishness that Jesus was calling out, it was rather where that selfishness was directed. Jesus' point to Martha was that there is A TIME TO BE SELFISH. But it must be:

1. Free from distractions
2. Filled with importance

(1)

Oftentimes, we view selfishness as a bad thing. We teach our children to share their toys and not be selfish. We think twice about selfishly finishing the last of the dessert when people are still behind us in line. We can always work to put others before ourselves, whether in our own family, or in the church. But while this is the selfishness we want to avoid, there's any number of studies out there, both scientific and not so scientific, that make a good point about taking time for yourself.

On the airplane safety demonstration, they encourage you to fit your own oxygen mask first before helping others. The logic is obvious, if you don't take care of yourself first, you wouldn't be able to take care

of many others. That same line of logic can be applied about taking care of yourself before you take care of others – whether it's taking care of your own body with healthful food and exercise, taking time for your marriage before taking time for the kids, or if it's taking personal time in God's Word before the busyness of life creeps in and takes it away.

It is the latter that Jesus is talking about in our gospel for this morning. Mary and Martha were two sisters who lived in the small town of Bethany, several miles outside of the city of Jerusalem. Jesus would stay in this house often enough, and so when Martha heard Jesus was going to be in town, she welcomed him to stay with them. Likely, Jesus' disciples also joined him at the house for the meal. And so with approximately 15-20 people to serve, there were preparations that needed to be made. Martha, was the one who was making the preparations. But it wasn't just that Martha was preparing the meal, but Luke records that **"Martha was distracted."**

She, probably more than many, recognized Jesus as more than just a good teacher. Maybe she even viewed him as the Messiah who was promised in the Old Testament. And here she had Jesus in her household, and yet what was concerning her? Making sure everything was perfect. The "what" was distracting her from the "why" she was doing it. It's not that "what" she was doing was wrong, it was the "why." She let this distraction cause her to become selfish, she let this distraction cause her to become angry at her sister, she let this distraction cause her to become spiteful of Jesus. Martha had A TIME TO BE SELFISH, but it was not free from distractions.

In our technological world, we are more distracted than ever. Smartphones enable us to check e-mail anywhere and anytime. Facebook sucks up time at a breakneck speed. Go-Pro cameras enable us to capture any and every mundane moment in our lives for people to see. We like to think of technology as a helpful tool, which it certainly can be, but it can also be a black hole which consumes us. We are selfish when we use this technology and become absorbed by it, but this is not the way that we want to be selfish. This selfishness is not in our best interests. Because carried out to its logical conclusion, this selfishness leads you away from people and relationships and what's important in your life.

But it's not just technology that can be a distraction, our life can be a distraction. We are distracted by events that happen around us – for instance by the constant political squabbles. We are distracted by our jobs, we are distracted even by our families. Distracted from what? We are distracted from God's Word. When we let everything around us take center stage; when we let everything around us worry us, excite us, or frighten us, we put God's Word in the background. We treat God's Word like last year's Christmas present – something we played with for a while, but now only take out when we're bored. There are 168 hours in a week, how many of them were spent in God's Word?

But God's Word is not like last year's Christmas present, God's Word is living and active, having our ultimate self-interest in mind. A TIME TO BE SELFISH is when we're in God's Word. When we're in God's Word, distractions don't seem as important, distractions don't seem as worrisome, and distractions don't seem as troubling. Because when you are selfish with God's Word, you can see how much it's talking to you. God's Word is not just some horoscope with general predictions about how to live your life. God's Word is personal and specific, giving you guidance not only for this life, but shows you the way in the life to come.

But even though this is something we know, or at least we should know, how often do we forget it? We forget it when we get distracted by our fantasy football teams, our video games and our favorite shows. We forget it when it goes in one ear and out the other. We forget it when life gets in the way – trying to take

care of the kids, trying to update the house, trying to stay patient at work. But then when things don't go exactly the way we want them to, where's the first place we turn – to God. But usually not to congratulate him, but rather to complain to him, like Martha, "Don't you care?" Don't you care that I'm not able to hear the sermon because my kids are a distraction? Don't you care that I am forced to work two jobs? Don't you care that my home life is a mess?

Oftentimes our attitude is to wait until the distractions are no longer distractions, and then we'll pay attention to God. Instead of using those distractions as an opportunity to turn to God in prayer, to turn to God's Word for comfort and strength. Because it is in God's Word that we find how much he does care. He cares about our souls. He cares about us being in heaven. He cares so much that he lived a life in your place, enduring your punishment. He cares so much about you that he wants a life free from distractions. Not that those distractions will miraculously disappear, but you will be free from them, free from worrying about them. This is A TIME TO BE SELFISH – selfish in God's Word.

(2)

Because when we are selfish in God's Word, we discover what is truly important. A quick Greek lesson to illustrate this point. There's two different words in the Greek language to describe knowledge. One of them describes a knowledge learned through study, the other describes a knowledge learned through experience. Many Christians can know the Bible through studying it, coming to church, reading devotions, etc. But it's when you know the Bible through your experiences, do you come to a full understanding of how important it is.

Martha thought she knew what was most important. She thought her sister needed to help her prepare the meal. But it was Jesus who showed what was most important. It was Jesus who answered Martha, **"You are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed – or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."** Mary selfishly chose listening to God's Word – not because she didn't want to do the chores, but because she knew it was important.

What Martha experienced in Jesus' rebuke taught her what was important. She now knew from experience, and she would take that experience with her. It was Martha who knew what to say several months later when her brother Lazarus died, **"I know God will give you whatever you ask."** It was Martha who confessed that **"Jesus is the Christ who is coming in the world."** She knew! God's Word is filled with importance.

"Only one thing is needed," Jesus says. Listen to him when he says it. Take God's Word in for yourself, because it is filled with importance, the only importance. I know there are plenty of things clamoring for your attention, plenty of worthwhile causes to participate in, and plenty of important things in life. But none of them can compare to the importance of God's Word. In time, the importance of everything else fades, but God's Word remains important. It is in your ultimate self-interest. We may think that doing all these other important things like raising family, going to work, keeping your body healthy are benefiting us, but God's Word is what truly benefits us. God's Word is what overflows from your heart into the rest of your life.

I'm not telling you anything new here this morning. This is probably a story you've heard from the Bible before. It's not anything different than what I will tell you any other week. So what am I telling you

new this week? I'm telling you there's A TIME TO BE SELFISH with God's Word. BE SELFISH and take every opportunity you can to hear God's Word – not only in here in worship, but at home, and in Bible studies. Be selfish and get to know what God has done not only for the world, but also for you! Be selfish then and don't wait for someone to tell you a way you can help carry the gospel of Christ, but look for opportunities to serve God, look for opportunities to be an example to others, look for opportunities to grow in your faith.

This is what believers do – they listen to the Word of God. Now the Word of God likely won't come to you as it did to Samuel in our first lesson, but it comes to us in the Bible. This morning we see some wonderful examples of believers listening to the Word of God – in coming up to be baptized, in a few minutes we'll see other believers listening to God's Word by becoming part of a body of believers, and a few minutes later we will see more believers listening to God's Word and partaking in his body and blood.

May this encourage you to listen to God as he speaks to you in his Word. I invite you today to let the Word of God speak to you like it did to the young boy Samuel in our first lesson. I invite you today to let the Word of God dwell in you richly and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. I invite you today, and each day hereafter, to sit at the feet of Jesus like Mary and hear all that God has done for you. Amen.