

## Choosing the Good Part

Luke 10:38-42

Pastor Ryan Harmon

So thankful for our worship team! I hope you guys are. (*Applause*) I think one of the things that I'm so thankful for is they remind us of what is true, right? And boy, we as a people are liable to forget, aren't we? So it's easy for our minds and for our hearts to kind of go astray, start to put prominence or importance on things that don't deserve it. Are you that way? I'm sure you are. If you're human, you're that way. Can you think of times where maybe you've had to come to grips with the fact that you've taken something important for granted—that moment where it kind of hits you? You kind of have a moment of clarity, and you have to face the fact that this really great thing was right in front of me, and I was taking it for granted.

As I was thinking about this, I thought of a few examples from my life. The first is when I was 10 and I had this little, windup motorboat. It was blue and white. It would zip through the pool. It was the greatest thing ever. I loved it! And one day my friend Alex said to me, “Hey, can I borrow that boat?” And I said, “Of course, Alex.” I'm a generous person, you know...a generous 10-year-old. “Yeah, sure, borrow it.” He brought it back a couple of days later; it had grape gum smeared all over it, and I thought, “I don't think I should have trusted Alex with that toy.” Right? Kind of took it for granted. Didn't realize how important that toy was to me until I had grape gum everywhere. That one's a light-regret moment.

Slightly higher-level regret, right? This is during my dating relationship. At one point in my relationship with Jenee<sup>l</sup>, I kind of—I don't know how you describe it, other than that I was being a doofus, right? (*laughter*) I said some things, did some things, that were not good. And Jenee<sup>l</sup> took some time, you know. She kind of set this boundary and she was, like, “I've got to think about this for a second and decide; do I want to go the distance with this person, you know?” And you could pray for her sanity, 'cause she decided to marry me. She stuck with me. But that was a high-regret moment for me—one of those moments where you think, “What have I done...what have I done?”

Last moment was a moment where someone helped me realize that I was taking Jesus for granted. I got invited to this conference in 2001. One of my best friends invited me to come to this conference with him. And as the speaker gave his message, I remember thinking that I thought too little of Jesus. His title was this: *Jesus, the Smartest Person that's ever lived*. And when you think about that, we know from Colossians that Jesus, like, everything was made by Him and it's holding—it's held together by Him. Well, surely, He knows everything. He is the smartest person, right? But that was mind-blowing to me. I walked out of that conference and I thought, “You know what? Jesus was only about this big to me before I came in.”

How should we be people that don't take Jesus for granted? Or maybe I'll phrase that positively: How do we think much of Jesus? And if we did think much of Him, what would look different in our life? That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Luke 10. We're just kind of going to be camping out in five little verses: Luke 10, verses 38 to 42. And this is a familiar story; you've heard it before. It's a passage in a scene with Mary and Martha and Jesus. And because it's so familiar, I want to just beg you to kind of stick with me and maybe open your mind to think about it a little differently, 'cause I know that I've thought, maybe, a little incorrectly about this passage in the past. So, verse 38, Luke 10:

**Now, as they were traveling** (That is Jesus and His disciples.) **...as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary...** (NASB, Luke 10:38-39a)

Now, in Luke's gospel this passage takes place after Jesus has made the decisive turn and has begun His final journey to Jerusalem. In Luke 9:51, it says that *Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem*. There's this resolute determination that Jesus is on a mission and He's heading to the place that He knows His mission, His life, His ministry on earth is going to reach its climactic point, right? He's headed to the cross, and as He goes, because He's Jesus, what's He doing? Well, He's ministering. He's stopping in all these towns. He's announcing the kingdom of God. He's teaching people about all that God is like, about what His kingdom is like, and He's proclaiming it and He's manifesting it Himself, kind of showing it to people. And we reach this town. We know this town is called Bethany. Bethany is about two miles east of Jerusalem. We know this because, in John 11 and 12 we read about Mary and Martha and their brother, Lazarus. You'll remember that Lazarus is the person that Jesus brought back from the dead, and that took place in Bethany. Now, Bethany was a favorite stop for Jesus. And so, why do I tell you all this? Well, I tell you all this because it's important to know that this wasn't some stranger that Jesus was arriving at the house of. Jesus knew Martha and Mary, and Martha and Mary knew Jesus. In fact, at one point it uses really particular language in John where it says *Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus*. And it uses kind of a construction in the Greek that just really is trying to portray affection, massive affection. This is the familiar friend of Jesus. So, that's our scene. Picking up again in Verse 39:

**She had a sister** (That's Martha.) **called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word.**

Okay, now we need to camp here for a few minutes, because we're liable to miss kind of how important this little sentence is. This is a sentence that packs a punch. So, let me rephrase it for you. You could think of it somewhat like this: Martha had a sister named Mary, and Mary was acting like she was one of the twelve disciples, sitting down at Jesus' feet, just like them. That's what Mary's doing. All right? We know that because disciples, in that day and age, are people who sat at the feet of a teacher. And so, sitting at the feet is a clear indication that this is a disciple of this person.

So, we need to talk about disciples for a few minutes. I'm sure you're familiar with the word discipleship. You've heard that word; we use it here a lot. And discipleship isn't a biblical word, necessarily, but it's one that is derived from a biblical word. It's derived from disciple. Disciples live a life of discipleship. That's a description of their life. But, just like any word, I think this word disciple—discipleship—can start to get a little fuzzy over time, and maybe it can start to mean to us things that it never even really meant to the people that first used it. Sometimes, when we think of discipleship, we start to think of a program, right? A discipleship is, “I memorize these 15 verses and that's what we mean by discipleship.” But that's different than what was originally meant.

So, long story short, disciples in the first century, in Jesus' world, disciples were really common. Every rabbi that was worth his weight had disciples. Philosophers had disciples. So, when you think of Plato or Socrates, they had these schools, and the schools were made up of disciples. Politicians have disciples. So, discipleship, being a disciple, wasn't an invention of Jesus, and that means that when the disciples chose to join Jesus, they knew what they were getting into. They knew that it meant that their life would now revolve around this person. I think we lose this

emphasis a bit today, because we don't use this word too often in the personal sense. We say things like, "I'm a follower of Jesus," or, "I'm a Christian," and those are good. But disciple really packs a punch. It's a high-commitment kind of word.

So, what did disciples do? Here's what disciples did. They joined themselves to a teacher and became students or learners or pupils of his. Sometimes the word apprentice is used. Pupil is used in other places in the New Testament. So, they're learners. They're learners of a teacher. That's what they did. And many of them joined this teacher at great personal sacrifice. They left house and home. They left their family and their children and their occupations in order to have their lives revolve around this teacher. And the disciples of Jesus did that, right? They dropped their nets—a huge commitment!

And so, now, what was their goal? That was what a disciple did, but what were they aiming at? What were they headed towards? Well, here's what every disciple did. See, a disciple was with a teacher, learning from that teacher, in order to become like that teacher. Disciples are with the master, learning from the master, in order to become like the master. Jesus himself says this in John 6. He says, "*A disciple, when he is fully formed, becomes like his teacher.*" So, the disciples of Jesus are those who are with Jesus, learning from Him, and learning to be like Him. I think follower, sometimes, is a little too weak. I think, sometimes, the word Christian almost is too generic. It doesn't really carry much weight in terms of how my life is different now. See, being a disciple is a high-commitment thing. It's a life-is-never-going-to-be-the-same kind of word. And that's the seat that Mary sat in.

Sometimes I try to think, "What is a modern-day equivalent," right? What is something that is a little bit like this for us? And the only thing I can come up with is this experience I had a few years ago. So, one of my good friends, Clint, on the side, kind of as a hobby, he practices magic. He's an illusionist; he even might say he's an illusionist. You know, magic might be below him, right? He's an illusionist. And then, Clint is really good. We've had him come, for the staff, and do, like, a Christmas party for us. And he's amazing; he blows my mind at times, right? And I'm analytical. And so I'm always trying to figure out: how did he do it? "Clint, how did you do that?" And there've been a few times where he's blown my mind to such an extent that I've pulled him aside and I'm, like, "Listen, man, like, I know you became a Christian, right? So, you've got to promise me you're not, like, conjuring up some dark arts here or something, right? 'Cause this looks like freaky stuff that you're doing. And he always promises me, "No, it's just sleight of hand," or whatever. But, because I'm relentless, I keep saying to him, "Tell me how you did that." And Clint won't because a magician never does what? Reveals his tricks, right? There's one point where I got so desperate, I said to Clint, I was like, "Clint, what do I need to do? What must I do to know how you did this?" And Clint got really serious, and with these slightly scary magician eyes, he looked at me and he goes, "You would need to become my apprentice. Do you want to be my apprentice?" And everything got really serious. Like, time stopped, and I started thinking of all that that would involve, right? I'd probably have to get up on stages like this and do shows. I'd have to go over to his house and, like, learn from him all the time. And I thought, "Nah, I'm good." (*laughter*) "I'll Google it, alright"? It was a heavy question. I understood the cost that was involved.

Being a disciple was a big thing. It was a high-commitment thing. Jesus said there was a cost involved. So, now, turning back to Mary—that's the seat that Mary has chosen to sit in. But here's a really important fact about that world, about that social world. See, the truth is that women were not allowed to be disciples, period! Not of a rabbi, not of a philosopher. Women could not sit in that seat, and, yet, Mary did just that. She sat down, as a disciple, and, in essence said, "I want to be

with Him, learning to be like Him.” So, the question we have to ask ourselves is, “What would compel her to do such a thing,” right? It was a bold, courageous, audacious thing. What would compel Mary to take that huge step? We’ll come back to that in a minute. Let’s continue on in the text. Verse 40:

**But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him (to Jesus) and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.”**

I get Martha. Like, I understand Martha. Just think about her world for a second. Hosting a dinner is no small ordeal. Hosting thirteen men that have just walked two miles in Middle Eastern heat is a pretty big deal, and they showed up unannounced, right? That’s a big deal! And here, she’s having to do it all alone—and she’s a little upset. The Greek word for what she is, is—it would be technically—she was ticked. Okay? (*laughter.*) Martha was ticked, and that’s clearly conveyed in the way that she talks to Jesus. Even her question assumes an answer. She feels really justified in her anger, and she’s basically saying to Jesus, “Listen, an injustice is being done, and you need to fix it.”

So, what was she mad about? I think it’s certainly this surface-level thing, right? Like, Mary wasn’t doing her job. She wasn’t doing the thing that Martha knew she needed to do, and she needed help. And, of course, we don’t like it when people don’t carry their weight, right? If you remember being back in school, like, learning there was a group project was always the best and the worst thing, ‘cause you knew, inevitably, there’d be one person that wouldn’t carry their weight and you’d have to do more—and you’d get angry about that. You’d feel a little bit like that’s unjust, and it is. It’s not fair. On a surface level, Martha’s a hundred percent correct here.

But I think there’s another level as well. See, I think Martha knew that what Mary was doing was totally inappropriate in that culture, and I don’t think she wanted it to happen anymore. In fact, in that culture, what Mary was doing would bring shame on that household, and Martha was looking at Jesus and saying, “This isn’t right. This isn’t proper. Tell her to stop it.” One commentator had this to say: “Mary’s posture and eagerness to absorb Jesus’ teaching at the expense of a more traditional womanly role would have shocked most Jewish men.” So, Mary chose to do that which women weren’t supposed to do, because—and here is the key—Mary saw that Jesus was in the house. And when someone of that caliber is in the house, all bets are off. Everything changes. Your perspective on what is important changes. Your concern about what is proper or what others will think kind of goes out the window, because this person is worth it! See, Mary’s heart is saying, “Jesus is here. Nothing else matters...nothing else matters!” So, Martha’s upset. She wants a correction. Mary’s doing an improper thing, an audacious thing, and let’s see how Jesus responds. Verse 41:

**But the Lord answered her and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but *only* one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Vs. 41-42)**

“**Martha, Martha.**” I think, when we say that, it sounds almost condescending, but make no mistake, there’s tenderness and gentleness and care in what Jesus says here. Any time in the New Testament you have a name repeated twice, it’s intended to convey, kind of, compassion. Jesus is going to correct, but he’s going to do it compassionately. He cares about Martha. And in light of what we said, in fact, in light of what we just read from that commentator, Jesus’ response is pretty amazing! That commentator said, “Most Jewish men would be shocked,” but Jesus is anything but

shocked. Jesus is approving. Jesus is saying, “Mary is doing the exact right thing, exactly what she should be doing in this moment.”

Now, at this point, as I've heard sermons or I've read books on this in the past, usually, what we do is we tend to think, okay, so here's the point: Are you more like Mary or are you more like Martha? And then we start to say, “You know, Martha's kind of the Type A, servant type—likes to serve and worship Jesus by doing—and Mary's more of the contemplative, and she likes to learn and she likes to worship Jesus just by being, you know. And then, we even sometimes put those two in opposition to one another and say, “So, if you're a Martha, you need to maybe learn from Mary. And if you're a Mary, well, you need to learn a little bit from Martha.”

But I think that misses the point of the text. Now, is there anything wrong with serving? Well, of course not. Right? Like Jesus says Himself, “I didn't come to be served, but to serve.” There's nothing wrong with being a servant, with working with all your heart for the Lord. There's nothing wrong with that. In fact, I think hospitality is really something we take for granted a little bit. And I would even say that the first step in evangelism, before people will hear what we have to say is, “Are we welcoming? Are we hospitable?” It's really important!

Well, what about the other side? What about the contemplative side? That's really important, right? Being kind of someone that just loves to sit and just soak in who Jesus is and who God is—that's great, right? We encourage people all the time, “Go, take time to be alone with God. Go step into solitude. Go, be alone.” I think, around this church, I'm so thankful we value the arts and, in some ways, just kind of looking at a piece of art is a contemplative thing. And is that good? Well, a hundred percent.

Both of those things can be true and that can still maybe distract us from the point of the text. See, I think when we get to the point of the text, it's this: It's “Jesus is on the scene. Class is in session.” And that changes our perspective on everything. Everything is different. See, when the offer to be a disciple comes, what Jesus intends to teach us isn't that we should be more like Martha, more active, or that we should be more like Mary, more kind of just present and more being. It's not that. What Jesus intends to teach us is that we can do everything that we do differently. We can do it in the manner that He did it. We can learn from Him how He would live our life, if He were us, right? Jesus wants to teach us in that level of particularity—and Jesus was the greatest person that ever lived. Think about Him in the Gospel of Luke—crowds, it says, they crawled on top of one another to get close to Him, right? Children and adults alike, right? Like they were mesmerized by Him. There were people that climbed up in trees just to see Him. A woman climbed through the crowd just to touch the hem of His robe, because power would go out from Him. This is simply the greatest person that's ever walked the face of the earth, right? And being with Him, being His disciple, learning from Him, learning from Him how to be like Him, is the deal of a lifetime. And you take it when it's right there for the taking!

Jesus said **Mary chose the good part**. Jesus is the good part, and the call to discipleship is open to all people. He invites everyone to come. Class is in session. Front-row seats are available. That's the offer that Jesus gives to us. Earlier I asked, “What would compel Mary to do such an audacious thing,” and I think by now it's clear, right? So, Jesus is so incredible. The greatest person on earth is in your living room, and when the greatest person on earth is in your living room, you eat a snack, right? You skip the meal. Who cares about food? You know, I think also what was in Mary's mind is, “If I recall, He just fed five thousand. I think He's got the meal covered.”

So, as we reflect on this text, here's my question. Probably two. Are you thinking much of Jesus? Are you lifting Him up? Are you growing in your respect and admiration for Him? How do we do that? How do we become people that do that? Second question: Are you living as a disciple of His? Have you taken up this call to be a disciple, to be with Him, learning from Him, in order to become like Him? Or has the greatest person in the world offered you the opportunity to have a front-row seat and maybe you, we, have taken it for granted? Because, if I'm honest, I know I have. I know there are times where I do. I know there are times where I need to ask myself, "Am I being a disciple today? Am I learning from Jesus today?"

I want to make an admission to you. I was wrestling with this text this week. I was really struggling. I went to bed on Tuesday night, and early Wednesday morning, I was awakened and one little thought went through my head that just floored me. And the thought was this: Ryan, you are Martha. And it just hit me, well, like a bag of bricks. Now, that might be confusing, because I just said the point isn't to think, "Am I more like Mary or more like Martha," so let me explain what I mean. See, as we enter into discipleship with Jesus, it's not that he tells us to stop doing things or just to sit and learn more. It's that Jesus is saying, "I'm going to teach you how to do everything differently. I'm going to teach you how to do it in the manner that I would do it." See, Jesus was very active, wasn't He? Look at Him in the Gospel. Man, this guy is moving all the time. When you read through Mark, Mark uses the word *immediately* about seven thousand times. Jesus immediately did this; then He did this; then He did this, right? There are high levels of action. But one word that we could never use to describe Jesus is worried, hurried, bothered, out of sorts. He's never like I am when I'm a little late to a meeting and I'm driving and I'm, maybe, not kind or loving to those that are driving too slow, right? That wasn't Jesus. That's not Him. See, Jesus was active. Jesus was busy, but he never did it in a manner that was filled with worry or bothered—a bothered spirit. That's not who Jesus was. And He intends to teach us how to do things the way He would do them. See, that's the opportunity that's available to us. It's not that we stop doing things; it's that we do what we do differently. Life's got to be lived. The laboratory for discipleship is the life that we're living, and Jesus intends to teach us how to do all those things differently. That's what we get to do as disciples.

So, here's a question: How would Jesus do your job? How would He conduct Himself in your workplace? How do you think He'd do that? Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever prayed and asked Him, "Jesus, how would You do this if You were me?" How would He raise kids? I know Jesus didn't have kids, but we also just said that Jesus knows everything, right? I'm pretty confident He'd be a better parent than me. How would He do that? How would He deal with His neighbors? How would He walk through family conflict? When He's buying a house, how would He do that? These might sound silly, but that's our life, right? And we want to be disciples right where our life is happening. How would Jesus do those things?

This is why it's so important that we think much of Him. If I'm a businessman and I don't think Jesus knows a thing about business, am I ever going to really think of myself as submitted and being kind of a learner of Jesus in my business context? Well, the answer's, "No." If I think He knows nothing about what I'm doing, why would I talk to Him about it? How do we start to think that Jesus is the greatest person that's ever lived, the person in whom all wisdom and knowledge is found? And then, we address Him that way, and we say, "Lord, teach us how to do it as You would do it."

So, how am I like Martha? All right, well, I'm stepping into a new role, right? All of us know, in this room, right, whenever you step into a new job, it doesn't matter what the job is, there's always a

learning curve, and it's stressful. I was a barista at Starbuck's. When there was a line for drinks, that was a stressful moment. We all go through stressful moments in our work, and here's what I notice in myself. When that starts to happen, I just start to kind of buckle down, put my head down, burrow in, grit my teeth, get these white knuckles, and I just try to power through. Right? There's a lot to do, gotta get it all done, and I want to do it well, so I'd better work really hard. And, of course, I want to work hard. But what I don't want to do is do it in a manner that's marked by worry and being bothered, right? I want to do it in the manner of Jesus. I want to learn from Him, how would You do this? See, when I say I'm doing it in the manner of Martha, what I mean is I'm doing it in the power of the flesh. The flesh is just what we can do without God, right? We don't want to do anything that way. I don't want to do my work that way. So, when I serve, I don't want to serve in the manner of Martha; I want to serve in the manner of Jesus. Right? I need to learn how to do that. I want to learn, as a disciple, how to do that. When I'm alone, when I'm on a mountainside, I want to be alone as a disciple, learning from Jesus. How should I be doing this? How should I walk through this?

See, Mary chose the good part. Jesus is the good part. And, Church, class is in session and enrollment is open, right? He's taking disciples; He's taking students—and that's an offer we do not want to pass up. So, I'll ask you, “Are you hurried? Are you worried? Are you bothered? Are you getting ready for a vacation, and everything is stressful and chaotic in your house?” I know what that's like. Well, is it possible that, if that's kind of what's going on inside of you, is it possible that maybe you're doing it in your own power? Is it possible that, maybe, you've taken for granted the fact that Jesus has said, “Hey, I want to come; I want to teach you; I want you to learn from Me; and don't worry, My yoke is easy; My burden is light.” How do we be a church; how do we be a people that think much about Jesus?

Here's one practical thing I'd love for you to think about this week: What if just one morning, you would say, “Lord, today, I want to be a disciple. I want to learn from You,” and then throughout the day, you just ask yourself, “Am I being a disciple? Am I being a learner? Am I asking Jesus to come and teach me, give me His wisdom, give me His insight, help me to do it as He would do it?” Just see how that goes. And then, when we gather together again, let's be a people that, as we worship, as we talk to one another, let's raise Jesus' name up as high as it can possibly go. We can't think too big about Jesus. And let's be a people that stir one another up to be disciples of His, to be committed to Him, that the world may look at us and they may see Him, as He's working through us. Let's let it be so. Let's pray.

*Our Father, we thank You so much that You sent Your son Jesus to die for our sins, to do what we could not do, to make this sacrifice and to bring justification, to make us right with You, and we praise Your name for that. And, Jesus, we praise You. We praise You, because in You is hidden all wisdom and knowledge, Lord, and we want to know You, and we want to respect You and revere You. And we thank You that You've given us the opportunity to be disciples of Yours. Help us know how to do that. We pray that You would do that by the power of Your Spirit, for the glory of Your name. Amen.*

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