

Week 4: The Good Portion

Preview

Our text for today is very short, but it has profound implications. Luke, by the Holy Spirit, compares two different responses to Jesus in a way that challenges our understanding of what it means to follow Him.

Text: Luke 10:38–42

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."

Devotion

This short passage holds a lot of truth. Coming right on the heels of the Good Samaritan, you might be thinking that Jesus expects you to attend to Him the same way the Samaritan attended to the wounded man. If this is how we love our neighbors, surely loving God is similar, right? The Bible gives us many reasons to think Martha is doing a good thing by serving Jesus and His disciples. So it's all the more shocking that Jesus says what Mary is doing is even better. Listening to Jesus teach may not look like much, but Jesus says it is the good portion, something you get to keep forever.

Bible Study: Applying the Text

During medieval times, interpreters of Scripture thought of the text as having four senses. The first is the literal meaning—what the text actually says—and the other three were different things they could *do* with the text. These three extra senses were related to the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love. Faith was related to Jesus, and hope was related to the future. But the sense related to love was essentially the **moral** sense, looking for clues in the text about how we should live.

While we don't think in terms of four "senses" today, there is something helpful about recognizing that not every verse explicitly tells us what to do. Only some passages are literal commands—the others contain things like principles or examples.

When we think about applying the text, we bring that same sensitivity. **Not every text was written to you**, even though it was recorded for your benefit (Romans 15:4). So how can we better discern how to apply what we are reading? Here are a few tips:

1. Look for moral **evaluations**. Does the Bible describe anything here as good or bad?
2. Look for **examples**. Does the Bible depict someone worth emulating or an example to avoid? Pay close attention to what God does—as Father, Son, and Spirit. God is our prime example in all things.
3. Look for **commands**. Some commands are to just one person or group of people; these function as an example but may not apply to you. Commands given in the New Testament are most likely to apply to you unless the context says otherwise.
4. **Remember** that in a fallen world good things may create conflict for us. God is both perfectly just and perfectly merciful, but it can be difficult for us to reconcile the two in the moment. We don't get to resolve the tension. We have to do our best to obey both. Love is never a valid excuse to condone sin.

Once you have a clear sense of what God values and what He expects, then you can begin translating that to your context. Remember: God's character hasn't changed, regardless of how culture has.

Observe, Interpret, Apply

Observe: What do you notice in our passage?

- Key questions:
 - Who are the people in this story, and what are they called?
 - What does each person in this story do? Make a list for each.
 - Are there any words that show up repeatedly?
 - What clues does the passage give you about right and wrong? What is explicitly called good or bad? What is only implied to be good or bad?

Interpret: What does this passage mean?

- Key clues:
 - Note the repetition of serving and of Jesus as Lord (master).
 - Mary is a model of discipleship here.

Apply: How should we respond?

- How much time do you set aside to serve Jesus?
- How much time do you set aside to listen attentively to Jesus's teaching?
- Do you feel more pressure to serve or to learn? Why do you think that is?
- Why do you think Jesus would want His disciples to learn from Him?

For Further Study

- Consider word studies on the following key terms: listen, teaching, distracted, serving, help, anxious, troubled, and "good portion."
- Jesus came to serve: see John 13:1-17.
- Jesus came to teach: see Matt. 7:28-29; 9:35; 23:8-10; John 18:37.

Study Tool Spotlight

One tool that every Bible student will encounter sooner or later is the commentary. Most commentaries are written for either pastors or teachers, so unless you are preparing a lesson, you probably won't be investing in one. Instead, some of the best insights from commentaries are often gathered in Study Bibles. One we recommend is the [ESV Study Bible](#). It will provide insights into the text of Scripture and its background that will help you as you observe, interpret, and apply God's Word.

Prayer

When we learn from Jesus, we are not just storing up facts but being transformed by the truth. Pray that God would give you patient and attentive hearts this week, and wisdom about when and how to cultivate those times of being transformed by sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Next Steps

Next week we will look at two passages instead of one: Luke 12:13–21 and 14:25–33. Reading these ahead of time will help prime you for discussion. We also encourage you to read from the end of this week's passage (starting in Luke 11:1) through 12:12.

Leader Notes

Production Notes

Initial Observations

- Addressing anxiety
- Appears to be first meeting
- Martha's desire to serve Jesus prevented her from listening to Jesus
 - We face a similar danger: being so preoccupied with serving Christ that we cannot listen to Him
- Short passage
- Jesus's ministry as a physician is wrapped up in His ministry as a teacher
- What's the one thing that's necessary?
- How do we listen to Jesus? Not by getting quiet in your room! It's by reading His Word.
 - Promise: it will not be taken away from you, either
 - (Why would we think we need to pursue quiet contemplation? Where does that idea come from? We want to feel something and reading the Bible too often doesn't accomplish that.)