

One Thing Is Necessary

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[0 : 00] Well, as you grab a seat, if you could turn to really just over the page to Luke chapter 10, we'll be reading from verses 38 to 42. Luke chapter 10, verse 38 to 42.

Now, this is speaking of Jesus and his disciples, Luke 10, verses 38 to 42. Now, as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 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. But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary.

Martha has chosen a good portion which will not be taken away from her. Well, many people say that we live in a busy age.

[1 : 07] We have more gadgets and appliances than any age before, but many things to do stuff for us. But many of us still feel like we're more busy than ever.

And we don't have, we have too many things to do. And maybe you might say not enough time to do it. And even if we're not more busy than the past, we certainly feel that way. We feel like the hours in the day get shorter and shorter, not just because of the sunlight, but just because the number of things that we end up cramming in and that we don't have time to do.

It's not uncommon to ask someone, how are you doing? Or how is your week? And they say, good, but busy. Busy is a really common response now. In my time in St. Andrew's, a lot of people would give that response saying they're busy.

Busy was like the standard response. How are you doing? Busy. Not well, busy. And as a student at university, I felt busy. I was, I remember staying in the library until 11 o'clock, finishing various pieces of work, going to church, helping with that, helping with CU.

And then I started working for the church. And then I got married. And then I had a baby. And now I look back on those student days. I don't know about you, if you've been in university. And I think, wow, what was it like to be a student?

[2 : 20] I had so much time. As you'll know, though, each season in life, though, there's different amounts of busyness and different seasons of life. But I think it's fair to say that busyness is something we can all relate to at different times.

The problem with busyness is that we can have lots of good things, but we can miss the important things, the most necessary things.

And our passage this morning is the well-known story of Mary and Martha, five short verses, but in them really the potential to completely reorder our lives.

Not just around what is good, but around what is necessary. It's a lesson in priorities. And so we're going to dive straight into the passage, first of all, with our first heading.

One thing is necessary. That's the title of our sermon. That's the very unimaginative title of our first point. But it really gets to the heart of what we're thinking about. That one thing is necessary.

[3 : 18] Let me read again from verse 41. Jesus says, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary.

Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her. The story of Mary and Martha is, in some ways, you could say, the story of the important and the necessary.

Jesus has been going from town to town, village to village. And now we're told that this woman, Martha, has welcomed him into her home. And we should be thinking at this point, that's great.

Earlier in chapter 10, as Jesus sent out his disciples, he commends those who welcome them into their homes. And so Martha's doing the right thing here, in welcoming Jesus, in offering hospitality.

And then we're introduced to Mary, who sits at Jesus' feet and listens. She's also doing the right thing, as we'll come onto. Meanwhile, of course, Martha's in the kitchen.

[4 : 13] She's preparing food. That's what good hospitality looked like in those days. I think it's probably a bit like Lewis. And when you go to someone's house, you don't just give them a cup of tea.

You lay out all the spreads, you know, 10 types of biscuits, even if you only want one. Martha's going above and beyond. She's preparing all kinds of things for Jesus. Because that was fitting for hospitality.

So she starts getting frustrated, because instead of helping her in the kitchen, Mary is there listening to Jesus. And Martha does what any sibling will do.

Instead of going and talking to someone who's annoying you, you go and call the parent. And so that's what she does. She runs in and she goes to Jesus. And you feel sorry for her. You feel a bit sorry for her, maybe, but she goes to Jesus and says, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?

Tell her then to help me. Now, the language in that, we need to read it with that kind of force. She's standing over Jesus. She's telling him to get to intervene. But notice Jesus doesn't just lose his temper.

[5 : 14] He doesn't get angry with Martha. He gently says, the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary.

Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her. Let's be clear. What we're saying, what we're saying isn't that Martha was doing something that wasn't important or wasn't useful.

Jesus commands, he commends hospitality. However, it is necessary to sit at Jesus' feet and listen, to put it another way. While feeding Jesus is important, being fed by Jesus is necessary.

That's why what Mary was doing was so important. What she was doing then is the top priority, you might say, in the Christian life. That's really the point of this passage, the priority of listening to Jesus.

So why is listening to Jesus so important? Well, if you had been reading through Luke's Gospel, you'd have seen this theme of listening come up quite a few times. Let me just dot through a few places where we see the importance.

[6 : 22] Luke chapter 4 verse 32, we see that Jesus has words of authority. When Jesus is teaching in the synagogue, people are surprised. They're amazed at his teaching we read because they're words of authority.

That doesn't just mean that Jesus knew what he was talking about. They're comparing Jesus to the rabbis whose authority came from the Old Testament. Jesus in comparison speaks with his own authority, with the authority of God.

They're not just words of authority, but words of forgiveness. There's the famous story of the paralyzed man in Luke 5 verse 20, where Jesus says to the paralyzed man, your sins are forgiven. Those are really amazing words because again, only God can say that. Only God can forgive sins. And yet Jesus says those words later on in Luke 7 verse 14, Jesus comes across a funeral procession and you can imagine a procession like here, the body's being carried through the streets.

But Jesus steps in and he says, young man, get up. And the young man got up. Not just words of authority, not just words of forgiveness, but words of life.

[7 : 28] That's what Jesus' words are. These are important words. That's why we need to take Jesus' words seriously. Listening to Jesus then is foundational to the Christian life.

And possibly one of the most famous parables in the gospels illustrates this really well in Luke chapter 6 verse 46. Let me just read it to you quickly.

The one who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, Jesus says, I'll show you what they're like. They are like a man building a house who dug down deep, laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck the house but could not shake it because it was well built.

But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.

Very simply if you build your life, not just on Jesus, we often read that and we think build your life on Jesus. But notice it's build your life on Jesus' words. Whoever hears my words and puts them into practice.

[8 : 36] So very simply if your life is built on the rock solid foundation of Jesus' words, then you are safe. If you don't listen to Jesus, then your life has no foundation and you face destruction.

You don't need to be a genius to understand the point that we need to listen to Jesus. But notice it's listen and put into practice.

No one is saved by sitting in church. We can hear the gospel. You can hear the best explanation of the gospel ever.

You can hear the best evangelists preaching you the gospel. You can come to church morning and evening for 60 years again and again and again.

But if that word is just going in one ear and out the other and not penetrating your mind and penetrating your heart, you might as well have never been listening. It's hearing and doing and Jesus and what is the doing?

[9 : 36] What it's repenting and believing as we'll see later on. Jesus reinforces that point. He says my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word and do it. In other words, if you aren't listening to Jesus, you aren't part of his family.

I'm bringing all these things up because really this is in some ways in chapter 10, we're coming to a climax in many ways of what we understand of God's word. Words of authority, words of forgiveness, words of life, a word that is foundational, a word that makes us part of God's family. Jesus' words are vital. We begin the Christian life by listening and responding to Jesus' words. We continue the Christian life by hearing and responding to Jesus.

You might say we never graduate from listening to Jesus. It's not a thing you just do when you're a child. I've heard those Sunday school stories. We need to keep listening to Jesus.

The context of the story of Mary and Martha, of course, is Jesus on the road to the cross and this is helpful to us. The section is sometimes referred to as Jesus' School of Discipleship. He's set his face on Jerusalem where he's going to go and he's going to die and on the way he's teaching his disciples what it means to follow him.

[10 : 49] A couple of weeks, a couple of months ago, we saw a little bit about what that meant in denying self, taking up a cross and following Jesus. In the context of Jesus teaching his disciples on the way to the cross, sometimes it's called Jesus' School of Discipleship, you might say.

We can understand that listening to Jesus is a key central part of that act of following Jesus. It's no mistake that the next passage in Luke is the Lord's Prayer.

Listening to his word and speaking to him in prayer, you might say, are foundational aspects of following Jesus. First and foremost, then, a disciple is a listener.

They don't do their own thing. For the first disciples, listening to Jesus meant listening to his words but also listening to the Old Testament. For them, they just had those first half of the Bible as it were.

For us, we have the whole canon of Scripture. We have Jesus' words and the words of his apostles who spoke with Jesus' authority, all inscribed in these 66 books.

[11 : 57] One overarching story but penned by many authors. One divine author speaking through all of these authors. That means as we're reading God's Word, as we're reading the Bible, we need to remember it's God's Word.

These aren't just human words. This is God speaking. As it says in Hebrews 4 verse 12, the Word of God is living and active. This isn't just words about God.

This is God speaking. This is God's Word. God speaks as we read his Word, as we hear it read.

Listening to God's Word is not just essential, as I said, to coming to Jesus but to growing as a disciple as well. Peter writes in his first letter, like newborn infants, long for pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up into salvation.

Well, think about that illustration. How does a baby long for milk? It screams until it hears it. Until it has milk. A baby won't be distracted.

[13 : 02] You can't just give a baby a substitute like a dummy or give it a cuddle. If a baby is hungry, a baby is not going to be delayed. You can't just say later, baby won't just say, I'll have some milk when it's convenient for you, mom.

I don't want to cause you too much hassle. I had milk yesterday. I don't really want to have any milk today. A baby screams at a once milk, then and there.

It won't be interrupted. It won't be it short-changed. I should say, if you don't believe me, pop around at 6 a.m. tomorrow. But I think that verse from Peter never ceases to be challenging.

Do we long for God's Word like a baby longs for milk? Is that the way we see God's Word? We're not going to put it off. We're not going to put it to the side.

We're not going to be short-changed. Is that how much God's Word means to us? Well, that's what how much it meant to Mary. It was the voice that spoke the stars into space.

[14:07] Hear the words of eternal life, words of forgiveness, words that are foundational for life. Mary wasn't just going to sit in the kitchen and miss out on Jesus speaking. Women didn't normally sit at a rabbi's feet.

That wasn't something that Mary was breaking every cultural taboo by going and sitting at Jesus' feet. But Jesus' letter and Mary was going to. She didn't care who said what.

She didn't care that there were other stuff to do. There was lots in the kitchen, but she sat down anyway because when Jesus is speaking, there is nothing more important that we can be doing.

So the question for all of us then, what will it look like for each of us to grow in listening to Jesus? I want you to ponder that for yourself.

We're all at different stages in life. We're all at different stages in our Christian life. Maybe some of you, maybe you're just listening to Jesus for the first time, whether you're listening online or you're sitting here in the church.

[15:06] Maybe actually, maybe you've never heard about Jesus. Maybe you've sat in church and you've for years, for decades even, you've heard the word read and you've heard the word preached.

Maybe now and for the first time, that word is penetrating and you're really listening. Maybe for years it's just washed over you. Or for the first step for you, maybe you're listening, really listening. Because Jesus' call isn't just to listen, it's to repent and believe and follow Him. What does it look like for you two? What's the next step in listening to Jesus?

Maybe some of you would call yourselves a Christian, they're a follower of Jesus. You have listened to Jesus. You have repented and believed and you're living your life following Him. Let me ask you, are you still listening?

What does it look like for you to keep listening? It's so easy in the Christian life to platter, isn't it?

Can I ask you, are you regularly setting aside time to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to Him?

[16:13] Taking a daily quiet time or a devotion isn't something that is mandated, that's commanded in the Bible. But just think of it this way, if God speaks by His word, the eternal Son of God, the God who created all things, if He speaks and these are words of life that transform us, why wouldn't we listen?

I'm not speaking as someone who finds that easy, it's a discipline but some of the most important things are often not always the easiest things.

As important though as how many times we go to church or how many times we read the Bible though is how we listen and how we read. It's active listening, not passive listening. I think I've illustrated this before by saying passive listening is what you do in a lecture theatre about if you're hearing a lecture about bomb disposal, you kind of write notes as a student.

Active listening is when the bomb is in front of you and you're on the phone and you're hearing which wires you have to cut and what you have to do to dispose that bomb. That's active listening, that's the kind of listening that God requires of us as we come to His word, whether it's at home, whether we're reading with our children, our grandchildren, whether we're in church.

It's not just in one ear out the other, not just the tick box. It's better to read five verses and really listen than to go through the motions and read four chapters in the morning and it should just go poof in one ear and out the other.

[17:40] So what are we doing to listen? What are we doing to grow in listening? We often talk about gathering to worship and that's important but do we recognize that when we gather we also gather to hear, to hear God speak.

Is that how we approach coming to church each Sunday? I'm coming not just to worship, I'm coming to hear God speak to me.

I think if we thought about that more that would shape our attitudes, that would shape the way we come to hear. We would come with that same reliance that a baby comes in needing to feed, that Mary come to came to Jesus' feet needing to hear those words of eternal life.

Only when we've been fed can we serve God. We come to church on Sunday, we read God's word on our own so that we can be fed by God and now all that fuel us, strengthen us to serve Him.

So for all of us then, what's the next step? What's the next step for each of us? What will it look like for each one of us to become more like Mary? Listening is vital, it's a necessary thing more briefly than our second point.

[18:50] Why do we struggle to listen? We've seen that one thing is necessary, now let's look at many things distract. I think most of us will really understand where Martha's coming from.

We often find ourselves in situations where good and important things distract us from the necessary things. One of Jesus' most famous parables is the parable of the sower that I can read for us earlier on.

I think among other things that parable illustrates all the ways in which we struggle to listen to God's word. The devil snatches it away. Listening is a spiritual battle.

There's shallow soil, there's suffering, there's things in our life that can pull out our minds and make us struggle to pay attention to hear God's word. There's the cares of the world, there's the pleasures of life, desires for other things, all these things can distract us.

I think sometimes we can be a bit like, if you've seen the film up, where there's a dog that keeps getting distracted, it doesn't listen to its master's voice, you can just think of a dog in real life if you haven't seen the film up.

[19:58] But a dog can be really good, it can be listening to you as you say sit, but then the moment it sees a squirrel or sees a bull throw and it's suddenly distracted, we can be like that with God's word. We can be listening, but suddenly our attention will be taken away.

This thing is a spiritual battle. There are so many things that will easily distract us from God's word. So many good things. It's worth saying so many good things.

There can be hobbies, there can be TV programs, there can be a good book, nothing inherently wrong with these things, but these things can distract us from God's word. Frequently though, it isn't just the pleasures of life, good things as it were that distract us, but are never ending to do lists, busyness like distracted Martha.

You wake up and I don't know about you, but immediately my mind can be set on all the things I have to do that day, that to do list of, you know, yeah, straight away, you've got all these things you need to get done.

And if you're like me, it's so easy to just start doing the tasks instead of taking a breath and sitting down and listening to God speak and letting God's voice set the agenda for the day instead of a busy list of tasks.

[21:09] I'm not saying that as someone who finds that easy at all. But I know that when we let agendas, when we let busyness set the tone of our day, those things rob us of the joy that we're otherwise given by God's word.

We need to prioritize listening to Jesus. Otherwise there won't be space amidst the busyness. You can illustrate it, I don't know if you had the illustration of you trying to get tasks done in the day.

If you have to prioritize things, you have to think about it like fitting different size rocks in a jar. If you put in, if you have sand and small rocks and big rocks and you need to put them all in a jar, well, if you put the sand in first and then the little rocks, you're not going to have space for the big rocks.

You've got to put the big rocks in first, then the small ones, then the sand will fill up all the space and it's the same with our lives. The most important things have to go in first. And what we're being told here is that the most important thing is listening to Jesus.

It's got to be first. It doesn't necessarily mean it's first thing in the morning, but it has to be our first priority. First and foremost, and a disciple is a listener.

[22:19] And we need to, often there are reasons for listening though. It can also be related to Christian service. Maybe this is counterintuitive. You might think that me and Thomas and others in Christian ministry must find it easy to listen to God's word, but often it's actually when we think we're doing things for God that those things can distract us from listening to him.

We can have equally big to do lists of doing things for God. The question that we need to ask ourselves is are we doing what he asks of us? First and foremost, he asks us to listen to him and sit

at his feet and hear him speak by his word.

It's easy to blame our distraction from listening to God's word as all the busyness out there, but first and foremost, busyness is a heart problem.

And that's what we need to also identify. Busyness is a heart problem. In Kevin DeYoung's book, *Crazy Busy*, he says one of the biggest heart issues behind our busy lives is pride.

I like how he gives these what he calls the killer piece. There's people pleasing, proving yourself, performance evaluation, possessions, poor planning, perfectionism. All of these things come under that umbrella of pride.

[23 : 36] All these things can clog up our lives and make us busy. So for example, if we're trying to prove ourselves, we're going to say yes to doing all kinds of things.

We want to prove ourselves as a diligent church member, as a good friend, as a hard worker. We do loads of stuff because then we figure we're irreplaceable and we start finding our value from that. Pride can lead to busyness because it gives us an inflated view of our capacity, our importance. But of course, we don't have the energy to do all those things. We're creatures.

We're finite. We don't have infinite resources like our God. Part of prioritizing listening to God, to listening to Jesus is trusting that he does everything, that he has the power to do everything, not us. It's learning to say no. It's learning to be less busy and trust that God will do the things that we don't have time to do. I don't mean to sound glib in that, but it's really difficult often to say no.

[24 : 43] But we need to if we're going to prioritize and give time to listen to Jesus. Another problem behind our busy lives though is that our busyness often covers up the emptiness in our lives.

We keep busy because busyness sometimes justifies our existence. I mentioned that in the beginning in St Andrew's, this kind of standard response that people would give in asking how are you doing was busy.

That's partly because people's worth. It was almost a badge of honor to say that you were busy. Tim Creder in the *New York Times* says, busyness serves as a kind of existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness.

Obviously, your life cannot be silly or trivial or meaningless if you're so busy, if you're completely booked and in demand every hour of the day.

God has placed eternity in the hearts of mankind. And our hearts long to be filled. Some people would say that we're just chance atoms, but most people can't live that way.

[25 : 48] We know deep down inside that there is meaning to our existence. We crave meaning and we fill our lives with busyness to justify our existence, to give our lives meaning.

And Christians do the same thing. I regularly find myself having to tell myself my value isn't in the number of things I do or the importance of the things I do. I don't know whether you find that your value isn't in how successful you are in your career or how many people you manage or how good of a parent you are or how many things you do to serve in church or how many people rely on you. Our value doesn't line up busyness. It's not in what we have done or what we're doing or what we can do. Our value lies in what God has done, in creating us as His image bearers, in saving us to be His people.

And I think if we were more confident that God was the source of our value and worth and not the things we could do, I think I can guarantee that there will be fewer busy people running around frantically like me sometimes, mistakenly thinking that the things I do justify my existence.

I think then we'd have more time to sit and listen to hearing God speak, the God who gives our lives meaning. There are many good things then that clamor for our attention, many important things, but Jesus says one thing is necessary, sitting at His feet and listening.

[27 : 18] What we need to do is echo the prayer of Psalm 86 where the psalmist says, teach me your way, that I may rely on your faithfulness and His that give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name, an undivided heart, a heart that belongs to God, that is trained on Him and listening to Him.

I once heard it said that our relationship with God's Word reveals our relationship with God. Our relationship with God's Word reveals our relationship with God. In other words, our attitudes toward God is seen in how we treat God's Word.

If we love Jesus, we will love His Word and listen to Him. Conversely, if we don't love His Word, what does that say about our relationship with Jesus?

I find that challenging. I don't know about you. I want to end on this though because while the main application of this passage is that we need to listen to Jesus, it's really possible for listening to become just another of the things that we need to do.

Just another thing on our to-do list. Just another thing that we have to tick off. A religious obligation that we have to do. I need to listen to Jesus. That's the first thing I need to do today.

[28 : 30] We become busy even, busy listening to Jesus. Listening though isn't something we do for God. First and foremost, it's something that God does for us.

The direction of the Gospel, the direction of everything is God to us. God has spoken. He speaks us into existence. He speaks us from spiritual death to life as He opens our ears and eyes so that we can hear and respond to the Gospel.

God speaks by inspired words that are in His Scriptures. We listen not to fulfill an obligation, but we listen because we have relationship with a living and speaking God.

Listening is part of that relationship. We don't listen like a student in a lecture. We listen like a lover with their beloved. That's what I thought.

Although it would be great if each one of us were able to, if we came out of here and if each one of us ended up spending more time in God's Word and more time reading it, more time maybe listening to sermons, that would be wonderful.

[29 : 37] But first and foremost, my prayer for you isn't that you end up reading more, but that you end up loving Jesus and loving His Word more because then everything else will overflow.

When we loved His Word more, then it's naturally going to follow that we're going to want to listen to Him more. The listening will follow the love. Let's pray.