SUGGESTED PASSAGE: LUKE 10:38-42

38 Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him 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.” 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42 but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

MESSAGE GOAL:
The goal of this message on The Priority of His Presence is to understand that worship is fundamentally the privilege of being in God’s presence, and so we must begin by prioritizing His presence.

INTRODUCTION:
Worship is one of the most important ways of building our relationship with God. The purpose of worship is to draw closer to Him. But sometimes, we can easily lose sight of that purpose. If we enter into worship as just another religious duty, we have missed a key element of what worship is all about. Sure, when we worship, we sing and pray and confess with our words about God’s greatness and glory. But there is something even more important that should happen in our worship. The foundation of worship is the recognition that we are coming into God’s presence.

When we worship God, we are placing ourselves in proximity to His presence. We don’t do this to get something from Him, or impress Him with how spiritual we are, or get ourselves “revved up” spiritually, but so that we can be with Him, listen to His words, humbly receive His instruction and correction, and to be changed. Making the most of His presence should always be our priority.

What we do with our opportunity to draw near to God is what this story from Luke’s Gospel is all about. Jesus was invited to the home of two sisters, and He accepted their invitation readily. Jesus is always ready to be welcomed into our homes and our hearts. This was true for them, and it is true for us today. He wants to be present with us. But the important question is this: what do we do when He arrives there? How do we respond to His presence?

Sometimes in our walk with God we can get so busy with all the right spiritual activities—church, reading the Bible, witnessing, serving the needy, etc.—that we forget the importance of simply being with Jesus. In our story today, we see two different approaches to the spiritual life. Martha is a spiritual “busy bee,” always up and moving and doing things for God. Her sister, Mary, is more concerned with simply being with Jesus, sitting at His feet and listening to what He has to say. While Martha is totally occupied with trying to serve Jesus (and perhaps impress Him by doing so!), Mary is building a relationship with Him—not by doing anything, but simply by sitting at His feet.

I want to make three observations about this story. First, I want to highlight the critical contrast between the two sisters and how they respond to the presence of Jesus. Second, I want to consider Martha’s crisis complaint. And third, I want us to listen to the divine correction that Jesus offers. As we do, we should ask ourselves: In what way am I like Martha? And in what way am I like Mary?

SERMON POINTS:

1. A CRITICAL CONTRAST (VS. 38-39)

In verses 38 and 39 we are introduced to Mary and Martha

- Martha takes the lead in welcoming Jesus and the disciples into her home.
- Martha is energetic, vivacious, full of life, and has a strong personality.
- Mary is much more reserved, quieter and generally has less to say.
The contrast in their personalities can be seen in their approach to faith.

- Martha is a spiritual workaholic. She believes that if you want to be close to God, you should be as busy as you can be in doing God's work.
- Mary has a different approach. She believes that if you want to be close to God, you should simply sit at His feet.
- Every time Mary is mentioned in the New Testament, she is sitting at Jesus' feet.
  * She is at His feet after her brother, Lazarus, has died (John 11:32).
  * She is at His feet in worship in John 12:3.
  * She is at His feet in this story.

Mary: Sitting at Jesus' feet.

- Mary recognizes that Jesus is superior to her and that she needs to be in a place of listening.
- Mary recognizes that Jesus can tell her things that she cannot learn elsewhere.
- Mary recognizes that Jesus welcomes her to be near Him.
- Mary recognizes that it is not just information that she needs from Him, but relationship.
- Like Mary, you and I need more than a formal Bible study with Jesus. We need to hear from the Living Word Himself.
- If we only hear the Word without hearing from the Author Himself, we have turned our Bible study into an academic exercise.
- When we speak of “devotions” we mean that we are devoting ourselves to Him.
- Mary didn’t invite Jesus to have a Bible study with Him, but to come to know Him better.
- Do you desire to be in God’s presence to gain information or to deepen your relationship with Him?

2. A CRISIS COMPLAINT (VS. 40)

Martha: Distracted from Jesus by her work for Jesus

- Martha starts off well by welcoming Jesus to her house (verse 38).
- But then she gets angry at Mary because she isn’t helping with preparing for the meal.
- She impatiently asks Jesus to tell Mary to help her out (verse 40).
- She starts off with Jesus on her mind, but she gets distracted from Him by the gigantic meal she is creating.
- She is distracted by the good thing that she is doing for her guest and so isn’t in a close vicinity to her guest.
- All her preparations become about a performance, and she misses the whole point about being with Jesus.

Martha questions Jesus’ care.

- Martha’s annoyance leads to a theological questioning of whether He really cares.
- She is more concerned with serving Jesus than being with Jesus.
- Her theology is being controlled by her perception of her circumstances.
- She sees it as Jesus’ fault that she isn’t getting enough help because Jesus is occupied with “entertaining” Mary. She has seriously missed the whole point of Jesus’ visit.
- Notice that Mary doesn’t say a word about all of this. She is an innocent bystander.
- If you are doing something for God and you develop a bad attitude from doing it, you aren’t doing it for Him anymore.
- So Martha told Jesus what to do. That is never the sign of a right relationship with Him.
- She doesn’t request. She pretty much demands.

The problem is Martha’s underlying attitude.

- Underlying attitude: “If you really loved me, then…”
- Now, of course, we can find a little sympathy for Martha’s predicament. No one wants to be left to do all the work by themselves.
- Perhaps Martha is concerned about what she is missing out on or worried that she’d be too tired to take it in when she finally got the chance to listen to Jesus.
- But her attitude has become such that she wouldn’t even properly be able to appreciate the time with Jesus.
3. A DIVINE CORRECTION (VS. 41-42)

Jesus responded by questioning Martha's priorities (verse 41.)

- Jesus repeats her name twice. Whenever Jesus says something twice it means He is very serious!
- Jesus says that Martha has too much on her mind. She needs to settle down and get a proper perspective.
- She needs to let go of the frustration, irritation and blame, and look at her herself honestly.
- If serving God makes you difficult, then something is wrong with your service.

Jesus affirms Mary's choice.

- The principle that Mary grasped was “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).
- Martha is busy, but Mary is busy being blessed!
- Listening to Jesus should always be our first priority. Paying attention to His Word is the starting place for our spiritual lives. Through prayer and the Word, we should sit as His feet, just as Mary does.
- Jesus says that only a few things are really necessary. We sometimes make our faith too complicated.
- Jesus isn't hungry for a seven-course meal. He is hungry for you!
- Mary made the best choice. She understood why they’d all gotten together in the first place.

Being in God’s presence should always be the first priority.

- David was not called a man after God's own heart because he lived a perfect life, but because he was always pursuing the presence of God.
  * “One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” (Psalm 27:4)
  * “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’” (Psalm 122:1)
  * “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God.” (Psalm 42:1)

* Like David, we should long to be in God's presence and seek every opportunity to spend time with Him.
  - Instead of sending Mary into the kitchen, Jesus invites Martha to come join and sit at His feet.
  - Mary doesn’t have to say a thing to defend herself. She is quiet during the whole exchange. Jesus intervenes on her behalf. When we are in God's presence, we should let Him do all the talking!
  - When your service is keeping you from His presence, you need to readdress your priorities.
  - What kind of passion to do have for making a priority of God's presence?

SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

FOCUS OF YOUR FELLOWSHIP

Sometimes when you are really enjoying something you can lose all track of time and all sense of your surroundings. You can get lost in something you really enjoy, whether it be music, or a good book, or a great meal. It is easy, for example, when you are partaking of a tasty feast to enjoy it so much that you don’t pay much attention to the people with whom you are eating. You can be so busy “fellowshipping” with a tasty fried chicken dinner that you are fellowshipping with the food rather than the other people at the table.

PRESENCE LEADS TO IMPROVEMENT

There are a lot of important things that you can’t learn from books. For example, no one ever became a really good golfer by reading an instruction book. Instead, you can only become a better golfer through interaction with someone who has mastered the game. You watch and learn from what they do, you ask questions, and you ask them to critique your stance and your swing. Even the act of playing a round with someone who is better than you often will have the result of your improving your own game.
VISITING THE STOCKYARDS

A man once decided to take his kids from Dallas to the Fort Worth Stockyards and see the cattle there. But what he discovered was that you could not only see lots of cows there, but you could smell them! With all the cattle and all the manure, it smelled really bad. In fact, it was really stinky. So, it didn’t take long before he was ready to leave. He had parked all the way across the lot from the stockyards, but as he and his kids walked back to the car, he noticed that it still really smelled bad. So, they got in the car and rolled up the windows. But it still didn’t do any good. It was still smelly. And as they drove home it stayed smelly. So, when they finally got home, they found the stench had followed them. How could it be stinking in Dallas when the stockyards were in Fort Worth? The man checked all the kids to see if they were somehow the cause of the stench. Then he discovered the problem: he had carried the smell home on the bottom of his own shoes! It’s a good reminder that it is easy to analyze what is wrong with everyone else, but sometimes you are the cause of the very thing that is bothering you.

THE TOY TRAIN SET

Once a man bought a train set for his son. He thought it would be a great way for them to spend time together. The boy was very excited about the gift and hurried to open the box and pull out all the tracks and the miniature train. As soon as he started to try to force the lengths of track together, the father was immediately concerned that his son was going to break something. After all, everything was a bit fragile. So, he told his son that he would put it together. The son was very disappointed, but his disappointment soon turned to boredom as he was forced to just watch his dad do all the work of assembling the train and the tracks. The father got lost in the instructions and it took him a long time to put it all together. When finished he looked up and saw that his son has disappeared. He found him in another room and told him the train was ready, but by then the son had lost all interest in the complicated train set. What had been meant as an activity they could do together actually pulled them apart.

BACKGROUND BIBLICAL HISTORY AND CULTURE:

SITTING AT THE TEACHER’S FEET

In Greco-Roman culture, when a student wanted to show the utmost respect to their teacher they would sit at the teacher’s feet. It was the humble posture of a learner. By situating themselves at such an intimate position in relationship to the one who was instructing them, it showed how much they valued the education they were receiving and their close connection to the instructor. The Greek word “mathetes” means “one who is an understudy, one who knows that the teacher offers them insights they could never gain on their own.” It is a signal of the student’s recognition of the superiority of the teacher to them.

SERMON LINES:

This sermon will help you understand the importance of not just serving God, but of spending time in His presence. This sermon shows two different ways of relating to Jesus and emphasizes the importance of prioritizing spending intimate time with Him.

QUOTES BY DR. TONY EVANS:

“Whenever you hear the Word of God (the Bible) without hearing the Living Word (Jesus), something will be lacking in your Bible study.”

“Devotions is only an appropriate word when we are having the devotions with the Person we are devoted to.”

“The purpose of the written Word is always to lead us to the Living Word.”

“Whenever what you are doing for Jesus gets you upset with Jesus, then you have missed Jesus.”

“Could it be that your complaint about others is really reflecting a flaw in you?”

Life is busy, but Bible study is still possible.