

A Tale Of Two Sisters

Introduction. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.”

These famous lines, which open *A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens, hint at the novel’s central tension between love and family on the one hand, and oppression and hatred on the other. The book suggests that good and evil, wisdom and folly, and light and darkness stand equally matched in their struggle. The book makes prominent use of “doubles” to get and keep the reader’s interest.

We have an account in the New Testament that also uses “doubles” to teach us an important lesson. Luke 10:38-42 contrasts two sisters, Mary and Martha and their relationship to Jesus in a specific incident. I would not say that one did bad and one did good, but rather one did what was “good,” but the other did “better” or “best”.

So the focal point of our sermon today is not that we should be unconcerned with household chores. Rather, it is making a point about discipleship. Disciples of Christ need to consistently choose the best over the good.

I. Choosing The Best Means Being In The Right Place

- A. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus while Martha went to the kitchen.
- B. The Greek word (*parakathizo*) does not mean to just sit, but sit near. It implies that she got as close to the Lord Jesus as she could because of her eagerness to hear Him.
- C. Sitting at the feet of your master was the right place for a disciple. In Luke 8:35, the man whom Jesus cast demons out of sat at His feet, indicating respect. Paul said he was educated at the “feet of Gamaliel,” showing how carefully he was “taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers ...” (Acts 22:3).

II. Choosing The Best Means Listening To The Right Voice

- A. Mary concentrated on the words of Christ while Martha couldn’t concentrate on the words of Christ.
- B. While at the feet of Jesus, Mary “heard His word.”
 1. Luke switches the tense of the verb “heard” to an imperfect tense which indicates this was a continual listening and hearing.
 2. She listened with attentiveness to everything He said, and she did not tire of His voice or of His teaching (Acts 26:14-19; Hebrews 3:7, 15; 4:7).
- C. She sat close enough to really hear and understand what He had to say (cp. Matthew 19:22, 25; Luke 9:35). It implies that she continued to think about His words after He stopped talking.

III. Choosing The Best Means Setting Priorities And Watching For Distractions

- A. Mary’s priority was being close to Christ while Martha’s priority was serving Christ and others.

- B. “But Martha was cumbered about about much serving ...”
1. *Perispao* (also translated as distracted or worried) means “to be pulled away” by something. She had her hands full. It is a narrative comment added by Luke that makes clear who is right in the account.
 2. Is serving bad? No, of course not. “Serving” comes from the Greek word *diakonia*, from which we get the English word “deacon” (Acts 6:1; 11:29; 2 Corinthians 4:1). She was being a servant. We are commanded to serve one another (Galatians 5:13) and be hospitable (Romans 12:13; Titus 1:7-8; 1 Peter 4:9).
- C. If what Martha did was “good,” what was the problem? It simply was not the best choice at that point in time. We are told that Mary “hath chosen that good part” which means she decided for the “better” or “best” (depending on what you compare it too).
1. Mary made a choice — she knew there were other tasks that needed to be done, but she purposefully didn’t do those. Instead, she went and sat at the feet of Jesus. She did the “best” she could do.
 2. Martha was “careful and troubled” by what wasn’t the best use of her time and resources. She could have sat at His feet too. However, she chose to do something else instead. She was busy with good that needed to be done, just not right then.

IV. Choosing The Best Means Making Practical Applications

- A. It is a lot easier to be a Martha than a Mary.
1. It is easier to get involved with other interests than to spend time getting closer to God, and therefore driving the devil away (James 4:7-8).
 2. You need to make this year your time in which you get close to Jesus, sit at His feet, and listen to His words (Ezra 7:10; Proverbs 2:1-5).
- B. Sometimes what we deem close enough is still too far away to God.
1. We should not try for “close enough,” but we should abound in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58; 1 Thessalonians 3:12).
 2. Abounding also has its place in purity and holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:1-4). I don’t want to give anyone the impression that I am ungodly in my conduct.
- C. Take this year to set priorities to position yourself closer to God.
1. Faithfully attending every assembly and study opportunity of the church (Sunday for worship, Wednesday for additional Bible study, every service of every gospel meeting, etc.).
 2. Regular time spent in prayer and devotion to God to feed your soul.
 3. Regular Bible reading and Bible study in our homes, both individually and with your family, which will build everyone up in the faith.
 4. Regular allegiance to conquering negativity, including complaints and put downs/insults of and about others, and fostering a spirit of positivity.
 5. Regular time in loving your spouse, caring for them, and raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.
 6. Regular attitude and response to the question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Let’s answer, “Here am I, send me” (Isaiah 6:8).

- a) It's very encouraging to see people going beyond to serve in the form of calling, visiting, sending cards and texts, and taking other gifts and sacrifices to people who struggle.
- b) I've been reading a book (The Broken Way, Ann Voskamp) which suggests doing away with the concept of a "bucket list" — a life satisfied only by special indulgent moments — and instead emptying your bucket by serving others. This will create a "full" bucket in your heart.

Conclusion. God chose the poor and the few to do His work because the rich and the many, being preoccupied, refused Him. Ability is wonderful, but God is more interested in your availability. Christians who refuse to draw closer to God because of weakness, doubt, and/or sin usually fall away. Draw closer to God as you draw closer to death, judgment, Heaven, and eternity. It is not a shame to have just one talent; the shame is in not using it.