

At Jesus' feet

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Dean Donaldson

- After the prayer meeting on the Koppie last week I was lying awake in the early hours of the morning feeling quite disturbed.
- It was an awesome prayer meeting (I thought so anyway).
- A beautiful evening with the city lights making up the horizon.
- Beautiful, it makes me very aware of the loving care with which God created this place for us to live.
- But that is not why I was lying awake, disturbed.
- For the first time in many months, I felt God quite specifically intervene in the prayer meeting. He made us stop what we were doing and start praying into something else.
- It is pretty cool, but why was I disturbed?
- Because this used to happen to me a lot.
- Before I started Bible College, I used to be totally dependent on God to give me direction for sermons, prayer meetings or for leading the services.
- If God did not come through I would be in trouble.
- Now that is an awesome but uncomfortable place to be in.
- I lay in my bed and cried out to God (in my head, because Rachel was still sleeping) and asked Him why I have not been experience His guidance like I used to.
- I felt God say this to me (this is difficult to admit but I want us to learn from it) you don't spend time with me anymore Dean, you don't need to.
- It felt so wrong, I felt a sense of injustice. Like my toddler Gabriel, he gets so indignant when he feels like he has been unfairly chastised. He generally runs to our front door and yells for his mother until I apologise.
- But this was different, when the creator of the universe rebukes you there is nowhere to turn but to the truth of it. If there is one thing I understand about God is that He is a God who is just.
- I felt wronged because I have never spent so much time studying Gods word, praying for people, for intercession, doing God's work and planning to get us to be more effective as a church as I have done this year.
- But the rebuke was..."you don't spend time with Me anymore".
- I had become confident in my ability to do this thing in my own strength and understanding.
- How does this fit into the message of the gospel though?
- The last time I preached was on the gospel message, about the plan that God has been working on since the beginning, it culminated in Jesus and is continuing in us now.
- I spoke about the Gospel message like a marriage with Jesus as the ring. So there is an engagement period, then there is the wedding day (ring) and then there is the rest of your life exploring and enjoying the goodness of your union.

- Steve put that very nicely into context for us last week, he gave us a picture of the true story that we are in. The Genesis 1&2 story that ends in Revelation 21 & 22.
- It's a beautiful story that we somehow managed to miss in our day to day lives. We become those who live the story from Genesis 3 (the fall) and thus misunderstand the beauty of it.
- Let's see if I can pull these things together in a way that helps us practically grasp living in a Genesis 1& 2 story, the story of God creating us to be in relationship with Him, of being in shalom with our creator.
- There are 3 accounts of Martha and Mary in the bible which I want to look at to help us grasp this.
- In Luke 10:38-42, John 11 & John 12
- Let's turn to Luke 10:38 – 42 (ESV)

³⁸Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰But 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." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴²but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

- I don't know about you but I have heard many sermons on this story and read quite a few takes:
 - Saved by works or by faith
 - Women's role in ministry
 - Judaism vs Christianity
 - A feminist commentary on Luke that says that the only women affirmed in the Bible are those who are passive...
- These are all interesting but they seem to miss the point.
- Luke is very specific about the way he presents the gospel.
- Stories are grouped together for a reason.
- Look at this text, it is sandwiched between:
 - Good Samaritan – about relating to our neighbour.
 - This story – about relating to Jesus
 - The Lord's Prayer – about relating to God
- Its specific, things are put in place to convey a message.
- The fact that the story is about two women is important, not to tell women how to be better Christians. It highlights the importance of what is being said. Women are not mentioned often in the Bible, what this message would be saying is take note of this. This is an important message for everybody.
- So let's take note.

- The story of the Good Samaritan (works related) tells us that it is not about being saved by faith as this would be contradicting the previous passage.
- It is about the source/heart of our faith.
- Why do we serve, why do we love our neighbours, what makes it possible to do it correctly?
- 3 Characters, Martha, Mary & Jesus

1. Martha

- i. Distracted with much serving (NIV – all the preparations that needed to be made)
 - ii. She tittle-tattles on her sister, rats her out.
 - iii. She is anxious and troubled by many things.
- The reason this story is difficult for us to understand is that we can all relate to Martha here.
 - Who of us here is distracted by the busyness of life? Work, family, exams, church events, finding a girlfriend/boyfriend, maintaining a marriage etc.
 - Life is busy.
 - Joburg is busy, life is frantic, and we are distracted.
 - But being distracted by the busyness is normal to us. If we don't have a few things on the go at one time then we feel that something is missing...(New Zealand story?)
 - ❖ What else does Martha do? She tells on her sister. Why?
 - ❖ She feels a deep sense of injustice.
 - ❖ Life is unfair.
 - ❖ "Poor me", working so hard while my sister sits on her butt.
 - ❖ Can you relate?
 - ❖ It is something we were born with.
 - ❖ My children age 4 and 2 ½ do this already. Daaaad, Gabriel took my dinosaur...
 - ❖ Life seems unfair, but somehow we feel that it is more useful to point out what others are doing wrong instead of doing the thing that we should be getting on with.
 - ❖ As Christians, we are especially good at this. "Do you know what that church does?" "How can the church leaders allow that practice in the church" etc.
 - Martha is anxious and troubled by many things.
 - Who here is not anxious and troubled by at least a few things right now? Money, not enough time to study, your appearance, something somebody said to you, your future the fate of the world etc.
 - If you are not, tell me what drugs you are on because I want some. Even my dog wants some because he is troubled by many doggy things as well. I see it on his little doggy face. When will I get something decent to eat, will my owner take me on the same ridiculous walk again, when will they get it that I should be sleeping inside and they should be sleeping outside.

2. Mary

- i. She sits at Jesus' feet and listened to his teaching
- That is both foreign to us in this busy life but at the same time there is something appealing about it.
 - Who here feels like just sitting, taking a break? All of us do but somehow our sense of purpose and worth don't allow us to do it too often.

- There is more though, in 1st century Palestine it was the women's job, her role to tend to the guest. So this would have been very much out of character.
 - Imagine coming to my house for supper, when you get there I tell you that if you want to eat something you need to prepare it yourself and while you are at it can you make something for me to.
 - What am I doing at this time?
 - I am obviously lying on the couch with my feet up watching TV?
 - It would be nice if someone did that but it is not culturally normal.
 - You would want to say "Rachel, look what your husband is doing, tell him to...!"
 - But there is more; the term sitting at a Rabbi's feet is a rabbinic phrase for being close to, learning from the rabbi's words and actions. Literally being covered in the dust from his feet.
 - This was a practice reserved for men.
 - Imagine you were at my house making your own supper while I was lying on the couch watching a soapy and painting my nails.
 - No that's just weird, but it would have been as culturally out of place.
 - Mary has chosen to spend her time getting to know Jesus, being taught by him and allowing him to get to know her.
 - She chooses to be in relationship with him rather than to serve him (which was the norm).
 - In our society a busy life is normal, spending time getting to know Jesus is not normal but we do have a choice.
3. The 3rd character in the story is Jesus.
- i. He rebukes Martha lovingly (Martha Martha)
 - ii. He affirms Mary's choice
- Does Jesus rebuke Martha for serving?
 - No, he rebukes her for her anxiety and troubled state of mind.
 - He rebukes her because she is more concerned about what Mary is doing than she is about the serving.
 - She is being manipulative, creating conflict disrupting shalom.
 - The story of the Good Samaritan is about serving your neighbour selflessly.
 - The kind of serving that is happening here though is a serving for reward/recognition. Look at me; see what a good person I am.
 - See how hard done I am in my selfless serving.
 - How much of our service orientated behaviour comes from a place of needing people around us (perhaps even God) to see what a good person we are, how self righteous we are.
 - How often do we just serve because that is who we are, how we were created (in the image of God)
 - Now, Jesus affirms Mary's choice, the good portion (the thing that will benefit her), and says that it will not be taken away from her.
 - This is interesting, why do we work so hard?
 - Because we are trying not to lose the things we have. Our house, car, jobs, relationships etc. We don't want them to be taken away.
 - But how much work and effort on your part could have prevented the global economic meltdown we find ourselves in.

- Lots of good, hard working busy people have had all their stuff taken away from them by something that was out of their control.
- This passage is not telling us that spending time with Jesus (at his feet) will somehow protect us from losing our stuff.
- No, he is saying that the time you spend in relationship with Him is good; it is permanent and is something that will not be taken away from you.
- ❖ Are you all still with me?
- ❖ Because we are moving on.
- ❖ Let's turn to John and pick up this story at a later stage.

John 11:17-43

¹⁷Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." ²⁸When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus wept. ³⁶So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."

- I am not going to go through the whole text, but I want to focus on our three characters again.
 - This is the story about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (Lazarus is the brother of Martha and Mary)
 - It takes place in the same home as the story in Luke and is in a town called Bethany.
1. Martha – rushes out to greet Jesus.
 - i. ⁽²¹⁾ "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."
 - ii. ⁽²⁴⁾ "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."
 - iii. ⁽²⁷⁾ "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."
 - iv. ⁽³⁹⁾ "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."
- It all looks good, she rushes out to meet Jesus, and she says the right things on the surface but what is actually happening here?
 - The first statement is quite manipulative, if only you were here (i.e. it's your fault that he died but that's ok because now you can fix it.
 - It is very similar to Lord don't you care that my sister is lazing around, tell her to help me.
 - When Jesus tells her that her brother will rise again, she responds I know he will rise in the last days. Jesus is talking about now but she somehow can't believe this. She says that God will do anything that Jesus asks but does not really believe it.
 - She proclaims Jesus as the Christ, but when it comes to the tomb she still expects to find a 4 day old rotting corpse in the tomb.
 - Her words and her actions don't match.
 - ❖ How does Jesus respond to Martha in this story?
 - ❖ He takes the time to help her understand who he is; it's almost as if he can tell that she does not really have faith yet.
 - ❖ After he has taught her, she continues to say the correct things but still does not get it.
 - ❖ He rebukes her again, lovingly. Not for her busyness but because she does not believe. "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"
 - ❖ The point I am trying to make is that she is doing and saying what seem to be right but she does not actually believe the things that she says.
2. Mary (vs 32) – She fell at his feet and wept, If you had been here Jesus my brother would not be dead.
 - She fell at his feet and cried.
 - Have any of you fallen at somebody's feet and just wept.
 - It's a profound act of trust, she knew this man and he knew her.

- She plays no word games, she just proclaims a truth that comes from knowing: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."
- ❖ Jesus responds, not in teaching, not a rebuke.
- ❖ He is deeply moved in his spirit, he weeps.
- ❖ He then goes to the tomb to raise Lazarus from the dead.
- ❖ What I see behind this story is another message, showing us that a relationship with Jesus is the way to bring life where there was death.
- ❖ What does a glimpse of heaven on earth look like? It looks like this, people in such an intimate relationship with their creator. Things that were once dead coming back to life.

Lastly, John 12 (NIV) – quickly (vs1-8)

¹Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." ⁶He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

- This is the week before Jesus is going to be crucified; he is visiting his friends on his way to Jerusalem.
- 1. What is Martha doing? She is serving; there is nothing wrong with her serving at this point. No rebukes, just Martha served.
- However, there is another character that comes into play in this story.
- I think this is the thing that Jesus is warning us about in the previous rebukes made to Martha.
- Judas Iscariot – what is wrong with wanting to help the poor?
- Nothing, the thing that is wrong is the pretence about helping the poor not out of love or compassion but out of our own selfish desires.
- We may not be those who steal from the poor but we may have other motives. It makes us feel good about ourselves, we enjoy the recognition we get from others etc.

- We feel that we need to do it to justify ourselves (Genesis 3)
 - We are being warned that these kinds of motives don't really help the poor in the long run.
2. What is Mary doing?
- She is on her knees, at the feet of Jesus. This is a profound act of worship.
 - It's a year's wages poured out on someone who is about to die.
 - Imagine wiping a person's dusty, dirty feet with your hair.
 - Mary really gets it; by spending time in relationship with Jesus she understands that the correct response is a response in worship.
 - The text says that the fragrance fills the house...I can almost smell it.
 - Does our worship fill the world with an amazing fragrance?
 - Or are we those who are so busy, being busy because we are worried about the odor that may come out of the tomb?
 - I think that we are afraid of spending intimate time with Jesus because we are afraid that we might be asked to do something that produces a bad odor.
 - If I get to close to Jesus, he may ask me to do something I don't want to do?
 - That is the lie of Genesis 3 talking.
 - We are so busy trying to secure our salvation, redeem ourselves that we can't stop to spend time with our creator.
 - The reason we were created, to be in an intimate relationship with God.
 - Life is going to continue being busy, but in this season of change we are going to be those who are called to do something about the widows and orphans in our community.
 - But for us to be truly effective in this call we need to be those who know Jesus and are known by him.
 - It's another one of those world views that Jesus comes and turns on its head. To be effectively busy you need to slow down rather than speed up.
 - Let's Pray