

The Gauntlet of Busyness **Luke 10:38-42**

We are at the end of Luke chapter 10 this morning, working through a few chapters in Luke that aren't in the other gospels – chapters that give us wonderful insight into the life of Christ and what it looks like to be his disciple. These things happened in Judea, which is the region surrounding Jerusalem, about 6-8 months before Jesus died. Today we will be looking at a familiar story of Jesus and two sisters. It's a story we can easily relate to with a message we need to remember.

One of the answers people give when I ask them how they're doing is "Busy," or "Keeping busy." It's an answer I often give myself. It seems like being busy is a common thing in our world. We live in a busy culture. We have work and school and extra-curricular activities. We've got family stuff and church stuff. We've got houses to clean and maintain, cars to take care of, bills to pay, meals to make, dishes to wash, homework to do, snow to shovel, grass to mow, gardens to plant and weed... And then there are all kinds of hobbies, interests, and entertainment we want to take part of.

In the midst of our normal busyness there are times that are extra busy – times where there are more things to do than time to do them and we start to feel a lot of pressure.

The idea that came to mind is a gauntlet. (picture) A gauntlet is a miserable form of historic punishment in many different cultures. Soldiers would form two lines facing each other with enough space between for someone to run. The soldiers would have some sort of weapon to inflict pain, usually non-lethal, and the victim who was being punished would have to run through the gauntlet to try to make it to the other side. As they're running they're getting hit and smacked and bruised and cut, bouncing around from one side of the lane to the next trying to keep moving forward.

And that's the way it feels sometimes when we get in those seasons that are extra busy. We feel the stress and pressure and try to push ahead. We get tired and beaten down and do whatever we need to do to keep going. All we can see is the lane we're in and all the things that we have to do. Our lives are controlled by the

tyranny of the urgent. We focus on what has to get done and it's easy to forget about anything or anyone else.

Anyone been there recently? Anyone there right now? It seems it's becoming more a norm than an exception. And rather than losing ourselves in the never-ending gauntlet of busyness and letting it dominate our lives and beat us down, our story for today will help us see what we need to find life, even in the midst of busyness.

The story of Mary and Martha is very relatable and practical, but it can also end up making us feel guilty and defeated. I hope that as we dig into it this morning you will come away encouraged and hopeful.

Read Luke 10:38-40a.

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.

Let's stop there. This gives us the setting of the story. We have these two sisters, Martha and Mary. Martha had a home and when Jesus came to her village she invited him and his disciples in – not sure for how long. You can imagine from her perspective this was both a tremendous honor and a tremendous responsibility. Jesus was a big deal – what he was doing was making an influence on the entire nation. Having him in her home was a big deal too. Hospitality was very important.

So Martha became very busy as she went about serving her guests. Verse 40 says she was “distracted” with much serving, and I looked up the original word for distracted, it means “*To be driven about mentally. To be over-occupied, too busy, about a thing.*” It sounds like she was in the gauntlet of busyness. It was one of those extra busy times where she had more to do than time to get it all done.

She also has a sister who was with her and that sister was taking advantage of the awesome opportunity and sitting at Jesus' feet with the other disciples listening to his teaching.

You probably already know what happens next, but even if you aren't familiar with this story, you could probably guess. For Martha it had become a stressful situation and all she could see was everything that needed to get done. She probably couldn't keep up. But instead of helping her, her sister is with the other disciples, listening to Jesus. The stress and frustration built until Martha finally spoke up.

Read Luke 10:40b.

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."

This seems to indicate that there was a familiarity between the two. It's the first time we read about these sisters, but for Martha to confront Jesus like this wouldn't make any sense if this was their first meeting. We see in other gospel accounts that Jesus actually had a friendship with them and we can see that here too.

What I see happening is that when Martha was in the midst of her busy and stressful situation, the only thing she could see was her perspective. And from her perspective it looked like her sister was leaving her high and dry and Jesus didn't care. So she accused both of them – Jesus for not caring and Mary for not helping. She was frustrated and wanted Jesus to send Mary to help.

When we enter into the gauntlet of busyness, it's hard to see anything besides our own perspective. There's so much pressure and what we're doing feels all-consuming and all-encompassing. The world shrinks down to only what we can see and we sometimes assume that everyone else in our lives can see it too and feels the same way. We have assumptions and expectations that go unmet and we get upset with people just like Martha did. But Jesus' response helps us take a step back and see things more clearly.

Read Luke 10:41-42.

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."

Jesus gave a gentle response and tried to help her see what was going on, both inside her and in her sister. He pointed out that she was anxious and troubled about many things. He simply brought to light what Martha was already feeling inside. The word for anxious means: “torn apart, divided, distracted” and that’s exactly how she was feeling. He doesn’t criticize or condemn her for feeling that way. He doesn’t correct her as if her serving was wrong. It wasn’t right or wrong, it was just the reality of the situation and the effect it was having on her – the same effect it has on many of us.

But then he also helped her to see what was going on with her sister. And to understand this we need to understand the meaning of a few of the original words. He said one thing is “necessary.” It would be easy to think, “Wait a minute, Martha’s housework was necessary!” especially if you’re the one primarily in charge of housework in your home. If she didn’t do what she was doing people wouldn’t eat and there would be disorder and chaos. So Martha’s work was necessary. But the meaning of the original word is stronger: “*to supply what is absolutely necessary for life.*” So we’re talking about the basic necessity of existence, kind of like food, water and shelter. Jesus said, “You’re anxious and troubled about many important things, but there is one thing that is absolutely necessary.” And then he tells her what that is.

“Mary has chosen the good portion.” I had to look that up too and it means “intrinsically good part, portion, or share.” So in this case, I believe Jesus is referring to himself. With all the things Mary could choose to do, including helping her sister, she chose the intrinsically good portion, which was Jesus. He was the “one thing” that was absolutely necessary for her life. Mary desperately needed Jesus – she needed to find her life in him. He was in her sister’s home, so she took the opportunity to sit at his feet and learn from him. Therefore Jesus told Martha he would not take that away from her.

In her stress and anxiety the only thing Martha could see was a sister who wasn’t helping and a friend who didn’t care, but Jesus helped her see that Mary was doing what she desperately needed most and he wasn’t going to take that away. He wasn’t telling Martha that she should have dropped what she was doing to spend time with him like people sometimes think when they look at this story, he was helping her to see what Mary needed and what we all need most.

In John 15:4-5 Jesus told his disciples: *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*

One of the greatest barriers to us abiding in the Vine is the gauntlet of busyness. There’s a saying that goes like this: “If Satan can’t make you bad, he’ll make you busy.” There’s probably a lot of truth to that. If Satan can’t make you bad, he’ll make you busy, because the effect is the same. Busyness separates us from the One we so desperately need for life. And as we get separated we begin to wither, like a branch that’s being separated from the vine. Death begins to creep in like frost creeping in where it’s no longer warm. Death can take the form of selfishness where we only think about ourselves. It can take the form of apathy, where our heart grows cold toward God and other people. We start to not care anymore. And more and more we focus on ourselves and the things in this life.

That’s why Jesus told Martha, “Only one thing is absolutely necessary for life. Mary needs me and I won’t take that away.”

The reality of our lives is that they are going to be busy. But I don’t think that’s unique to our culture and time. Busyness has been around forever. And though I do think we need to take practical steps to avoid the gauntlet of busyness, I don’t think we’ll escape being busy. Being busy isn’t a bad thing, but being busy without regularly taking a break to abide in Christ will lead to our destruction. So the lesson to take away from the story of these sisters is that we need to be diligent and intentional to set aside time to meet with Jesus and sit at his feet. If you’re not doing that, you’re going to die. You’re already shriveling up and you might not even know it.

You need to carve out a time every day when you can meet with Jesus. No one can do that for you – you’ve got to figure it out. And no matter how busy you are, you can make that time – I’m busy like the rest of us and I find a way to make time for the things that are urgent and pressing in my life. There is nothing more urgent and pressing than getting life from the Vine. So just do it. Make the time.

And then in that time, bring your Bible – I suggest getting a good study Bible with some helpful notes to help you quickly understand some things. The best I’ve

seen is the ESV Study Bible, though I'm sure there are other good ones too. Make a plan for reading and meditating on God's Word. Maybe one chapter a day or one Psalm. Also spend time talking to God. You can do that as you're meditating on his Word. You can present your requests to him, for you and the ones he brings to mind. If you struggle to stay focused and alert, bring a prayer notebook and write down your prayers – I've done it for years and it's very helpful. You might also bring a devotional book that you can use at times as well.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."