

Encountering Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] The scripture reading comes from the book of Luke, chapter 10. Please follow along on the bulletin or your own Bible. Starting in verse 38, we read, 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 come help me. But 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.

[1 : 1 6] This is the word of God. Great. Thank you, Angie. Let's pray together and just ask God to come and speak to us from his word. Heavenly Father, Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, we come before you this morning.

As we come to your word, we want to ask you to speak to us, God. Why don't you take the words of God that are on the pages of scripture and write them in our hearts. Holy Spirit, we really ask you to come and be part of our time together this morning.

We want to hear from you. We want to encounter you. Lord, we want to hear what you've got to say to us. We want to receive your grace and hear the good news of the gospel once again. And so I want you to come do that.

Lord, whatever the condition of our hearts are this morning, some of us are anxious and worried by many things. Some of us are troubled. Some of us are exuberant because there are good new possibilities and horizons on the future.

Lord, whatever state our heart is in this morning, we ask for you to come and speak to us. Come and minister to us. Come and draw us back to King Jesus this morning, we pray.

[2 : 2 0] In your awesome and your gracious name. Amen. Okay, so let's dive into this very famous story. So Jesus comes to this town called Bethany and he comes to the home of two sisters, Mary and Martha.

And he comes and he has a meal with him. They invite him in to have a meal with them. And Jesus has obviously established a bit of a name for himself. He is known as a miracle worker. Lots of miracles happening by the hands of Jesus.

He's a great teacher. He's well honored and respected. And so it's a great honor for Mary and Martha to have this great teacher in their home. But for Martha, what's meant to be a great honor turns into a bit of a nightmare because everything is going wrong.

It's not that she's burnt the food or spilled wine on her new dress or anything like that. The problem is that her heart is flustered. She's anxious. She's worried. She's even angry.

And the reason is because her sister refuses to help her to do anything around the house. Look at what Luke tells us in verse 41. Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.

[3 : 31] I don't know if you've ever been in a setting where maybe a social setting or a business meeting where you've got a great poker face on. You look all fine. But inside your heart is anxious.

Right? That's what's happening to Martha here. She's hosting this party. But inside she's fuming. She's angry with her sister. And I can imagine Martha playing the conversation over in her head.

Right? I said this. And then she said this. And then I said this. And rah! Or maybe she's thinking what's going to come. Right? After Jesus leaves, I'm going to say this to my sister.

And then she'll come back like this. And then I'll nail her with this. And I'll seal the deal. And I'll get her in a corner. She's playing this conversation over in her head. She's not at peace.

She's not at rest. She's anxious and worried and troubled. Look at the other thing that tells us her heart's not in a healthy place. Look at what she says to Jesus in verse 40.

[4 : 30] She says, Lord, don't you care? My sister's left me to do all the work. How many of us know that when you're starting to feel sorry for yourself, things are not in a good place.

Right? When you start to feel like no one else cares. Does nobody notice what I'm doing here? I'm doing everything. And everyone's just sitting around having a great time. Sometimes when I feel sorry for myself, I know that my heart's not in a good place.

And that's what's going on with Martha here. Lord, don't you care that I'm doing everything? And Mary is just sitting at your feet. Just listening to you talk.

Now, what Martha's doing here is obviously important stuff. It's important that when someone comes to your home, you host them well.

You prepare a meal for them. It's kind of like if you go to the Nepali community in Hong Kong. Alan tells me that if you go to the home of someone in the Nepali community, it doesn't matter how full you are, they're going to give you more food.

[5 : 34] Right? They're just going to cook more food for you. It's part of the culture. If you come to their home, they're not going to let you leave without having fed you. And that's what's happening here. Martha, it's important to their culture.

Jesus has come. Someone's got to prepare the meal. Martha here is not being a martyr. She's not doing something exceptional. She's just doing what would normally be expected of her.

And yet, the problem is her sister's not doing anything. And that's got her frustrated. But look at what Luke tells us is the real problem here. The problem is not just that Martha is overworked or that her sister is a lazy slob.

The problem is that Martha's busyness, legitimate as it may be, has stopped her from actually receiving the one thing that she really needs in that moment.

It stopped her encountering Jesus. In other words, saying that is Martha is so distracted by doing all the good things that she's doing, the things that need to be done.

[6 : 35] She's so distracted by all that's expected of her that she's missed who it is that's come to her house and is offering to minister to her.

Look at what verse 40 says. Martha was distracted by much serving. It wasn't the serving that was a problem. It wasn't even the much serving that was a problem.

The problem is that she was doing so much stuff for Jesus, it had distracted her from being with Jesus and encountering His grace.

I don't know if you remember in Mark 4, Jesus tells a bunch of parables. And one of the parables He tells us, He says, But do you remember how Jesus applies that?

He says, Now in that case, Jesus is talking about the deceitfulness of riches and pleasure and that.

[7 : 59] But in love of his description, he says, Jesus is saying, The case with Martha here is her preoccupation, her distraction with the cares of life, with all the serving.

The problem of the good things is that they have the ability to distract us from the one thing we need. Receiving Jesus. Hearing from Jesus. Being ministered to by Jesus.

And Martha here doesn't reject Jesus. She's not like the Pharisees that are, you know, conniving how they can kill Jesus or destroy Him. She's not judging Jesus because He's eating on the Sabbath.

Martha's not saying, Jesus has become so liberal. That's not a problem. The problem is she's become so busy doing all sorts of things for Jesus, doing what she thinks is expected of her, that she's distracted from coming and sitting at His feet and hearing what it is that Jesus wants to say to her.

Now, what does this mean for us as a church? Friends, as a church, with all our doing, are we in danger of becoming more like Martha than Mary?

[9 : 20] Are we so busy doing, no doubt, important things that we don't know how to stop, how to sit at Jesus' feet and to listen to His Word? Maybe a question for us is, when we leave church on a Sunday morning, have you encountered the living God?

Have we worshipped Him and praised Him for who He is out of the overflow of what's in our hearts? Have we encountered the living Lord Jesus Christ? Have we been assured of our identity, that we are sons and daughters of God, that He loves us, not because of what we do for Him, but because Jesus died on the cross?

Friends, do we leave church on a Sunday morning saying, I've done what was expected, I've paid my dues, I've served, I've done what Jesus wanted, now I can get on with my life? Or do we leave church on a Sunday morning saying, God is great, I'm His son, I'm His daughter.

It's so good to come and meet with Jesus this morning. Friends, do we leave church on a Sunday morning anxious and troubled, worried and weary, or do we leave encouraged in the gospel, secure in the love of the Father, resting in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that our identity is in Him?

And that's of course Sunday, what about Monday to Friday? Maybe on Sunday we feel encouraged and built up, we've seen our friends, but Monday to Friday are we anxious and worried about many things, or are we able to come to Christ's feet, day in and day out, and receive what Jesus wants to give us?

[10 : 53] Martha's problem was not that she was busy, it was that her busyness kept her from Jesus. Now, before we criticize Martha too much, we've got to recognize there's something that Martha does really well.

The one thing that Martha does really well is that she takes her complaint to Jesus. She's obviously grumbling, a bit frustrated, but rather than going and grumbling to everyone else, rather than going and moaning about her sister to some other family member, the one thing she does well is she brings her complaint to Jesus.

Except she doesn't receive from Jesus what she expects, because rather than receiving support or sympathy, she receives a lesson. Look at what Jesus says in verse 41 and 42.

Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, and it will not be taken away from her.

When Jesus says one thing is necessary, he's not saying there's only one thing that needs to be done today. There are many things that needed to be done, right? If you're going to have somebody over for a meal, there's many things that need to be done.

[12 : 08] Just ask Teresa and Christina and some of the other people that hosted the wild dinners last night. There's many things that need to be done. The house needs to be cleaned. Meals need to be prepared.

Washing needs to be folded. Dishes need to be washed. There's many things that need to be done. And it's the same for us as a church, right? We could say, okay, there's only one thing that needs to be done.

We just need to meet with Jesus. And so let's just kill everything else. And so you come to church in the parking. Everyone just parks wherever they want. And there's no kids ministry. And the sound doesn't work, because Chris has just decided there's one thing that needs to be done this morning.

And everything's just a mess here. So Jesus is not saying, listen, just forget everything else. We only need to do one thing. What he's saying is, comparatively speaking, compared to the most important thing, compared to everything else that needs to be done, there is one thing that is infinitely greater.

There is one thing that is infinitely more important than all those other things. Those things are important. As great as they are, don't let those things distract you from the one thing that you must get done today.

[13 : 19] Which is what? To encounter the living God. And to receive his grace. And to be reminded that he is God, and that your life is secure in him.

That your identity is not in the things you do for him. And your identity is in the fact that Jesus died on the cross, and he looks you in the eye, and he says, my son, my daughter, I love you.

With you, I'm well pleased. Whatever else you do, make sure the one thing that you do is you encounter his grace. Martha, Martha, you're anxious and troubled, distracted by many things, but there is one thing that you need to receive today.

Mary has chosen that thing, and it will not be taken from her. Friends, there are many things in our world that we give ourselves to that are very fragile and can get taken from us any day.

As Hong Kongers, we work ourselves to the bone, right? Working 60, 70, 80 hours a week sometimes to build up our CV, to advance our career, to secure our job, to save up, to buy that apartment.

[14 : 30] And all those things are so fragile. One economic meltdown, one catastrophe, one worldwide pandemic, one disease, one change of circumstances, and those things can be taken for us in an instant.

Jesus says to Martha that the thing that Mary has given herself to will not be taken away from her. There's nothing that can take it away.

No boss, no circumstances, no economic meltdown, no worldwide pandemic will take away from her the identity and the security, the peace that she receives from coming and letting Jesus minister to her.

Remember how Jesus says in Mark 8, he says, what will it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? We can gain the whole world's approval, the whole world's applause.

You can get the awards of industry and affirmation. You can climb the corporate radar and hit the top ranks early on your career. You can be made MD at 30 years old and CEO at 40.

[15 : 36] You can get all the accolades of the world, but if you forfeit your soul, what's the point? And maybe we could ask, what does it profit a church to run every program, to have every ministry under the sun, to be expanding and growing and attracting new people, to be the talk of the town and the hip church of Hong Kong that everyone's talking about and yet we've lost our soul because we've been so busy doing things for Jesus that it's distracted us from coming and receiving the one thing that we need, to be flooded with the gospel and reminded that our identity is in him.

Okay, now what does this all mean for us? How do we apply this practically? Well, there's lots of applications. Okay, I'm sure that we're all smart enough to work out how to apply it, but let me give us three very simple ones.

Okay, you might need some pen and paper for this. This is really simple and practical. Okay, the first one is this. Come to church at 10.20, ready and prepared.

Okay, now some of the young guys are laughing. Okay, I know that sounds outrageous. I know. Come to church at 10.20, ready and prepared.

Okay, now why do I say that? The reason is because it takes a couple of minutes between arriving at church and being ready to worship God and encounter his grace.

[17 : 00] Okay, so picture this with me. You plan to come to church at 10.30 and on the way to church, your kids are fighting in the back, right? And we all know how peaceful and relaxing it is when our kids are fighting, right?

The kids are fighting in the back. And then your spouse moans at you about that thing that she's asked you to do for the 17th time and you forgot to do it. Okay, and you promised you'd do it yesterday, but you didn't get around to it.

And then there's a traffic jam. Or you get in a taxi, you try and call the taxi and the fifth taxi drives past you and doesn't pick you up. And then the taxi driver goes the long way around and you're late and charges you an extra \$20.

Or you catch the bus and the bus is late. Or you come here in your car and Ebenezer are doing renovations in the parking lot again. And there's no parking for us and you've got to go park at Queen Mary or something like that.

And you walk in and you're frustrated and irritated and suddenly you just, yes, all glory to you, Jesus, all right? Unless you are Superman or Superwoman, it doesn't work like that, right?

[18 : 07] Our human bodies are not compartmentalized like that. And when our body and our mind are frustrated, our hearts are not at peace and ready to worship. And so if you're like me, it takes a good few minutes to get ready and prepared.

Or maybe you come to church and everything works perfectly. Your kids are singing glory to Jesus in the way, in the car, and your wife is telling you how amazing you are. But still, it just, it takes a few minutes from the parking lot.

And so I want to encourage us, come to church 1020, chat to some brothers and sisters, come ready and prepared. And when you come down the ramp, just pray, God, I need to meet with you today.

I'm anxious and I'm worried. There's a hundred things in my mind. Lord Jesus, I need you this morning. And then come and worship him. Okay. Here's another thing on that.

This is point 1.B, okay? 1.B. Is try as little as possible to look at your cell phone on the way to church. And I know it sounds like I live in the 1970s and I'm not opposed to mobile phones, but what your phone will steal from you in way of distraction, you'll never get back.

[19 : 16] And so those 400 WhatsApp messages will still be there at the end of church and those Instagram likes will still be there after church. But looking at those things as you walk in will distract us and take us away from us.

What God wants to minister to us. And so I encourage us, look at our phones as little as possible. Okay, so that's one. Second thing is this. Really practical. Whenever you are serving in Watermark, whatever way you're doing it, flood it with prayer.

Just flood it with prayer. Okay, so you come here at 8.30 and you're setting up the speakers and the sound equipment and the sound's not working and you come to carry things. Before you do anything, you gather your brothers.

Hey, Leo, Chris, Henry, let's just pray together. Lord, we need you. Come and be part of our time together. Or you come at 9.30, you're serving kids ministry and you've got your outline and you've got the other people in your class serving with you.

Before you do anything, hey guys, let's just gather. Let's just pray. Jesus, we need you this morning. Come and be part of our classroom. Are you leading CG this Thursday and you sit down on Wednesday night to prepare and you open up your computer before you do anything?

[20 : 20] Lord Jesus, thank you my identity is not in how well I do. It's in the fact that I'm your son, your daughter. Come and speak to us this week. Or you're going to lead prayer meeting on Thursday night and you're driving to prayer meeting and you pray about the prayer meeting.

Lord, we're going to pray tonight but we need you. Come by your Holy Spirit and be part of our time together. Okay, whatever you do, flood it in prayer. And then the last one, very simple is this.

When you have your devotions, so tomorrow morning, you're going to wake up early, you're going to get into God's Word. When you have your devotion, put your phone away. Your phone is going to distract you.

You're going to get a WhatsApp message or your boss is going to tell you something or you're going to get a sign the stock market went down or went up overnight and it's going to take you another 10 minutes to get focused again.

Put your phone in the cupboard or in your bag and just spend a few minutes reading God's Word. Jesus, what do you want to say to me this morning? Jesus, I come to you like Mary. I need to sit at your feet.

[21 : 18] I'm distracted. I'm anxious. I've got that presentation later. Jesus, what do you want to say to me today? Okay, so three really important, very simple things. Martha, Martha, you're anxious and troubled by many things, but one thing is necessary.

Mary has chosen the good portion and it will not be taken away from her. This is the lesson of Luke chapter 10. This is what Jesus wants to say to us, that it's possible to do so much stuff for Jesus that we get distracted and we miss the one thing we really need, which is to be with Jesus and encounter His grace.

Just this morning, actually in my devotions, I read this from Revelation 3. Jesus' letter to the church in Sardis. He says, I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are in fact dead.

Wake up. Strengthen what remains. Remember then what you received and what you heard from me. Remember the gospel. Remember your identity that I love you. Your identity is in me. This is the lesson of Luke chapter 10.

Now, before we go back to worship, there's one other lesson we need to receive here. In fact, it's a far richer and profound lesson. And it's the lesson, in fact, you must understand if you're going to understand anything about Christianity and the Bible at all.

[22 : 38] If you missed this lesson, you missed the whole Bible. Okay? There's something we need to see here in addition to the lesson about busyness. What is it that Jesus wants us to see?

Simply this. Martha thought that she had to do something to be welcomed by Jesus. Mary comes to Jesus empty-handed. Martha thought she had to do a whole lot of stuff to be accepted and loved by Jesus.

Mary comes empty-handed. You say, that's it? That's what the whole Bible's about? Yep, that's what the whole Bible's about, right? That's the difference between those who find Jesus and those who don't.

Those who receive grace and those who don't. Those who find a rest in Jesus and those who leave Jesus' presence restless and anxious. Come to Jesus with your hands full of all the stuff you've done for Him.

Your accolades, your CV, your accomplishments, thinking that earns His acceptance. You'll go home empty-handed. Come to Jesus empty-handed. Say, God, I don't have what it takes.

[23 : 41] I've got nothing in my hands. Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to your cross I cling. And Jesus will say, okay, come and receive my grace. Friends, Jesus came to Mary and Martha's house not because He needed anything from them, but because He wanted to bless them with Himself.

And yet Martha was so busy running around, doing all sorts of stuff for Him, so busy trying to do things to please Him that she missed Him completely. Friends, let's not be like Martha.

Let's not be so busy that we miss Jesus. Let's not be so busy doing things for Jesus that we miss what He wants to give us, which is Jesus Himself. But more than anything, let's not come to Jesus with our track record and list of things we've accomplished, thinking that'll earn us His grace.

Let's come to Him empty-handed. Come to Him for His sake alone. Come to Him because what we need is found in Him and on the things that we do for Him. Let's come to Jesus once again.

Let's pray together. I'm going to invite Ellen to come and lead us. Lord Jesus, this passage this morning is so simple. It's a story of two sisters from thousands of years ago and yet it could be our story.

[24 : 56] God, in a city like Hong Kong, which we love to be busy, we love to do hundreds and thousands of things, things for you, good things, important things, Jesus, often we miss the one thing that we really need.

We miss coming to You. We miss receiving Your grace. We miss being reminded that our identity and security is not in the things we do for You.

It's in You. Lord, I pray for us as a church. I pray for Watermark. I pray that this thing will mark us. More than all the programs and events, the outreaches, and the things that we do, that this thing will mark us.

That, Lord Jesus, we know how to come to Your presence, to sit at Your feet, to be flooded in the gospel, to be reminded that our identity and our security and our rest is found in You, that, Jesus, we will be people who know how to encounter Your grace.

Lord Jesus, come and have Your way. Come and stir us, I pray. Come and challenge us. Come and call us back to You. Help us, we pray.

[26 : 07] Amen.