



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

The Kingdom Way: Don't Just Do Something, Sit There

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Rev. Steve Kramer

TEXT: Luke 10:38-42 (ESV)

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 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."

Years ago, there was a popular television advertisement for Smith Barney investment firm. It featured British actor John Houseman, who lauded the company for their hard work on behalf of their customers. He ended the ad saying, "Smith Barney, they make money the old-fashioned way. They earn it." And I've seen other companies talk about the way they operate as the so-and-so way. Years ago, for instance, the 3M Company, there was a book out about them entitled *The 3M Way to Innovation, Balancing People and Profit*. And in the United States, we proudly talk about the way the American way, the American way of life, adhering to the principle of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Well, today, in this passage before us in Scripture, we have Jesus describing once again for us the kingdom way. Citizens of Christ's kingdom operate the kingdom way according to Jesus. Remember, he came into this world announcing that the Kingdom of God was at hand and he was pointing to Himself as the means of entering in. Well, last week we learned about the kingdom way from Jesus, and that it involves exercising

radical, generous type of love towards all people. And today we have another teaching from him on the kingdom way. It's the Mary and Martha story. As I read that story, I find myself almost feeling sorry for Martha. She's giving it her best shot to serve Jesus. And yet she ends up being the one getting corrected by Jesus. I mean, she's the one who welcomed him into her home and prepared the meal for him. But Martha shows us that she had an issue with Mary, her sister. When Jesus entered their home, Mary proceeded to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his teaching while Martha was working like crazy, getting things prepared for him. In Martha's mind, Mary was acting inappropriately. She's acting like a man, sitting there being discipled by Jesus. Who does she think she is? She knows her place. You see, Mary was stepping outside the boundaries of that society. Women had their roles, and Mary was not fulfilling hers. She was acting as if she were a man, sitting and listening to the words of Jesus as he taught, like one of his disciples. And by the way, disciples typically studied under a rabbi to eventually become rabbis themselves, which was taboo for women back in those days. So Mary's sitting there while Martha scurrying about by herself out there. And I imagine Martha's probably clanging the pots in the kitchen and slamming some doors and clearing her throat loudly to get her sister's attention, to signal her to get in, get in here and do what she's supposed to do. But, Mary wasn't picking up on the signals. She was just focused on listening to Jesus.

Now our text implies that Martha was also getting irritated with Jesus for letting this sort of thing happen. He should know better, she's thinking. He should correct Mary. Besides, Martha's thinking, "she's making more work for me out here." Martha's face. I can just see it getting redder and redder until finally she couldn't stand it anymore. She stopped her working and went up to Jesus and asked in a rather confrontational way, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to serve alone?" Now notice Martha calls Jesus Lord, and remember, that's a divine title. It was first used by the heavenly angels as they announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds: "For to you as born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord." So, we see here some faith in Jesus being expressed by Martha in her questioning. She sees him as Lord. And that question is almost accusatory. "Don't you care?" As if to say to Jesus, "Come on, Lord, you should care that she's left me to serve alone Don't you care about me?" And then, of all things, Martha even had the nerve to order Jesus around a little bit saying, "Tell her then to help me." In other words, this is ridiculous. Get her back into the kitchen where she belongs. I would imagine that things felt a little awkward after those words. But, our story tells us, the Lord answered her and Luke affirms for us himself, as he says, the

Lord answered her, and Jesus is Lord. And He refused her order and firmly corrects her by saying, “Martha, Martha,” trying to calm her down. “You’re anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken from her.”

And the story ends there. Jesus has the final word. We don’t know what Martha did after that exchange. I hope she sat down and joined Mary, but we just don’t know. The Holy Spirit working through Luke obviously had his reasons for not letting us in on that, probably because this last statement of Jesus is the main point of the story that he wants us to pay attention to and act upon. He didn’t want us to miss it. He seems to be saying to followers of Jesus that sometimes it’s a better thing to sit and listen to him instead of always doing for him. He’s saying to Martha, “I’m here for you, so don’t just do something. Martha, sit there.”

This is not a story of action types versus the contemplative types, as some might think. I’ve run across plenty of Bible story books that ask the question, “Are you a Mary type or a Martha type?” But that’s not the point Jesus is making in this story. We need both of those qualities working in our lives. Remember, Jesus in the previous story about the Good Samaritan commended the man who served. Kingdom people are called to serve God and neighbor and loved ones. And while this story points out that women were and are welcomed and encouraged by Jesus to study with them and be His disciples, that really isn’t the main point of the story either. So, what is the main point, the takeaway, for those of us sitting at the feet of Jesus? What we have here is a teaching on the necessity of listening to the Word of Christ that He offers us as his followers. It’s about having fellowship with him. It’s the kingdom way. We get so busy and wound up with doing and we need fellowship with him to strengthen us, to build us up and guide us and keep us going for him. It is so vital to sit quietly with Jesus and to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly, as the Apostle Paul tells fellow believers in Colossians – to let him serve you. Earlier, in chapter ten of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus had actually taught his disciples – whom he was sending out at the time two by two to declare the kingdom – that they were not to be a bother or burden to those they called upon, that they visited. And he will even say a little later that the son of man came not to be served, but to serve. Well in this story, Jesus is walking his talk. Jesus had come to serve Mary and Martha with his presence and his teaching, and Martha was missing out on it. She was welcome into his circle to sit at his feet and listen and study scripture with him. Of course, serving is a very good thing to be doing, but don’t deprive yourself of the

opportunity to fellowship with the risen Christ and sit at his feet like a disciple and let him serve you His feast, His words of eternal life. Kingdom people you see sit at the feet of Jesus and listen and take in the word of Christ. It's the good portion Jesus was talking about when he said to Martha. Mary has chosen the good portion which will not be taken from her.

The good portion is fellowship with him, taking in his word, learning from him, allowing yourself to hear him, his promises and assurances like "Truly, truly, I say to you that whoever believes in me has eternal life." Who doesn't need to hear that again and again? And "Come to me all who are weary and burdened. And I will give you rest." We all need that. Or, "Follow me. And I will make you fishers of people." He's got a purpose for us. Or "I am the vine. You're the branches. Those who abided me and I and them will produce much fruit." He wants to help us have a fruitful life. Or here is instructions on how to be a faithful disciple of the kingdom, such as trusting Jesus with your life, or how to live out the great commandment and effectively fulfill the great commission he's given you and me of telling others about him and what he's done for us at the cross. And making disciples of all peoples we run into, teaching them to observe everything he's taught us. And let him pass on to you divine wisdom from above on living the life God has given you wisely. There's so much wisdom to be learned from Jesus. "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?" Jesus asks. Or "Why do you worry about what you shall eat or drink? Or where your Heavenly Father knows what you need? You're valuable to him. Trust him." This good portion Jesus gives, he points out, will not be taken from Mary. He tells Martha, "I'm not going to send you away from being with me. She's my disciple in my book. Fellowship with me is hers to enjoy and yours as well, Martha. And, you know, once my word gets into a person, it's there to stay. It won't return void." You see, the word of Jesus does something to us and in us. Kingdom people value then fellowship being with the risen Christ who died on a cross for them and rose again to save them and has promised "Lo, I am with you always. I'm available to you, and you're welcome to sit at my feet and be with me and take in my life-giving word." I love that image. When I open my Bible, I'm sitting at the feet of Jesus. Just envision that. He the teachers there to teach and train you and make you into a fruit bearing disciple who thinks as he thinks and loves as he loves, obeys as he obeyed and serves as he served.

So I'd like to end this message with a personal question for you to consider. What is your present relationship with the Lord and His Word? First of all, what's your

relationship with the living word, Jesus Christ, the word made flesh who dwelt among us in order to rescue us from sin and death? Is Jesus your Lord? Have you asked Him to take over your life and give you His eternal life that he offers to all who will come to him and ask in faith? I encourage you to do that right now. He promises he will not turn you away. And if you are already a believer in Jesus as savior and Lord, is this relationship with him growing and getting more intimate, making a difference in your everyday living because he's present with you to relate to and get help from? There's a reason for referring to the word, the Bible, as a means of grace. It's because it's a divine gift for you and me, through which we are saved and personally served by Jesus to the working of the Holy Spirit. There's power in that word. That word is living. It does something to you. It breathes life into your soul. Martin Luther once wrote, "The Bible is alive. It speaks to me. It has feet. It runs after me. It has hands. It lays hold of me." In this passage for the day, believers in Christ are encouraged to make time each day, to intentionally be with the Lord, to sit at the feet of our risen Savior and let Him speak into your life and teach you. It's a privilege. It's offered to all who open the door and welcome Christ into their home, into their life. There are so many ways to meet with him, by the way, and sit at his feet. There's worship, Bible class, Bible study groups, personal study. There's even the Christian Crusader daily podcast, which are focused on studying the Bible. Of course, there are devotions to use, like the upper room or our daily bread. I encourage you. Use the resources available and make the time to use them.

Dr. Haddon Robinson tells a story he heard from another pastor when he was younger, about a couple in his church, a mother and her son. The father had died when the boy was young. The mother and son had a very unique relationship. This was way back before television. Folks would spend evenings listening to the radio or reading to one another. They both enjoyed listening to good music. Theirs was a special relationship. In his early twenties, this young man met a young woman at the church, fell in love with her, and they decided to be married. Back then, during World War Two, housing in our large cities was very difficult to get. The mother, knowing they wanted to be married, said, "We have a two story house. I can make an apartment for myself in the upstairs. You and your bride can live in the first story. The only thing I ask is that we get a chance to spend time together because I'm going to miss the reading and the music." Her son said, "Mother, you can be sure that it's too important to me, too." The couple married for a while. Life continued with the son stopping by a couple of times a week to spend time with his mother listening to music, reading. He was busy, though,

and eventually days and actually weeks went by with only a call from downstairs where a brief glimpse the relationship was not what it had been. On the mother's birthday, the young man bought his mother a lovely dress, brought it to her and said, "Happy birthday, mom." She opened the package and looked at the dress. "Oh, son, thank you. I appreciate so much what you've done." He said, "Mother, you don't like it?" She said, "Oh, yes, I do. It's my color. Thank you." He said, "Mother, I have the sales slip. They told me I can bring it back." She said, "No, it's a lovely dress." He said, "Mother, you don't fool me. We've been together too long. What's wrong?" The woman turned and opened her closet, pointed, said, "Son, I have enough dresses here to last me for the rest of my life. I guess all I want to say is that I don't want your dress. I want you."

Out of that quaint old story of long ago about Mary and Martha. I hear the Lord saying something like that to you and me. Ultimately, he doesn't want your life as much as he wants you. If you're a follower of Jesus, a citizen of His kingdom, do yourself a big favor. Then don't just do something. Sit there. Sit at the feet of Jesus. Allow Him to serve you before you serve others. Let Him do something in you before you do something for him. That's what he wants for you. It's a life-giving way to live. It's the kingdom way. Jesus didn't bring you to himself to make you his slave. He brought you to himself to make you a friend. Amen.