



‘But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’
2 Peter 3:18

July 18

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Gospel reading: Luke 10:38-42

Pray for growth in the grace and knowledge of Jesus and **read** the passage together...

Looking around

Immediate context

Our present passage occurs after the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is Jesus’ challenge to his followers to live out the radical love for others that Jesus has shown to us.

In the next part of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, after our present passage, Jesus teaches his disciples the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of prayer.

Its place in the structure of the book

Jesus and his disciples enjoy the hospitality of Mary and Martha on their way to Jerusalem. Remember that in Luke 9:51 Jesus “resolutely set out for Jerusalem”. Since then Luke has been describing this journey as “the way”.

Its contribution to the message and purpose of the book

The “way” Jesus went to Jerusalem does more than just describe his journey towards his death and resurrection. It also shows what the journey of a Christian’s life should look like if we are ‘to take up our cross daily and follow him’ (Luke 9:23). Jesus’ interaction with Mary and Martha calls us to check our priorities as we seek to follow Christ.

Is the passage or part of it quoted elsewhere in the Bible or does it quote other parts of the Bible?

No.

How the passage contributes to our understanding of God, Jesus, humanity, God’s salvation, life together as Christians, discipleship.

This passage teaches us something about following Jesus that is incredibly important in any age, but especially ours. This is the lesson of kingdom priorities. It is often said that “the enemy of the best is not the worst, it’s the good”. Our priority in our journey of discipleship (“on the way”) has to be being with Jesus – learning from him and knowing him. This will sometimes require us to slow down, and not be so concerned with all that we think we need to do and achieve. Jesus contrasts the ‘many things’ Martha was ‘distracted with’ (Lk 10:41, 40) with the ‘ONE thing’ that is ‘necessary’ (10:42, 39).

Mary’s approach of being with and listening to Jesus (v.39) is portrayed as the way for disciples of Jesus; while Martha’s busy-ness and concern for the preparations she needed to make is shown to be not “the way.”

Martha was no less devoted to Jesus than Mary. See her faithful response to Jesus at the death of Lazarus, her brother (John 11:27). However, here Jesus says to Martha that “Mary has chosen what is better” (v.42). Mary had chosen to do what was “best”, while Martha had chosen to do what was “good.”

As Christians being hospitable is commended for all, not just those who feel they have the ‘gift’ of hospitality (see 1 Peter 4:7-9). Disciples are also challenged that working diligently is a way to serve the Lord (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). However, our priority must always be to choose “what is better”, not to neglect our faith in the busy-ness of life. Disciples must make sure they keep taking quality time to slow down and listen to Jesus, as Mary did. In our day this is to set aside time to immerse ourselves in God’s word and prayer.

We can also see from this passage that Jesus knows our anxieties, and loves and cares for us, as He knew and cared for Martha. But Jesus also knows what is best for us. His Word will direct us to this. Without regular Biblical reflection and challenge, our hard work and striving can easily morph into a works-based attempt to win God’s approval, which is definitely not the way for true disciples (see Ephesians 2:8-10). In this respect, it is interesting that Luke places this encounter immediately following Jesus’ encounter with the lawyer who desired ‘to justify himself’ (Lk 10:29).

Looking Behind

Relevant historical, political, social, geographical information helpful for understanding the passage.

10:38 Mary and Martha lived in Bethany, a village about four kilometres from Jerusalem (see John 12:1-3).¹ However, later, Jesus and his disciples are placed at the border between Samaria and Galilee (Lk 17: 11) and in Jericho (Lk 19:1), both places being further away from Jerusalem than Bethany. So Luke here has compiled his account of Jesus around the theme of “the way,” the journey of discipleship, not a strict chronological order of events.

Also, note the cultural importance of hospitality – “Martha opened her home to him” (Lk 10:38). Food preparation for guests was normally incumbent on the matron of the house.

¹Wood, D. R. W., Wood, D. R. W., & Marshall, I. H. 1996, c1982, c1962. *New Bible Dictionary*. Includes index. (electronic ed. of 3rd ed.) . InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove

10:39 People normally sat on chairs or, at banquets, reclined on couches; but disciples sat at the feet of their teachers. Mary's posture and eagerness to absorb Jesus' teaching instead of the customary preparations (Lk 10:40) would have shocked most Jewish men.² However, Jesus commends this radical attitude of eagerness to be with and listen to him.

Looking within

Movements or structure in the passage

Vv. 38-39: Setting the scene: Jesus at Mary and Martha's house

Vv.40-42: Jesus and Martha in dialogue

Important or repeated words, ideas, themes

As Jesus corrects Martha's misplaced priorities, he tenderly repeats her name ("Martha, Martha"; 10:41).

In the original Greek, Luke stresses the word 'one' in verse 42.

Important contrasting words (but, although, whereas, whilst) explanatory words (therefore, so that, for, because, since, in order that), timing words (next immediately, after, when)

"But" in verse 40 highlights Martha's predicament in contrast to Mary's relaxed pose, sitting under the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus then turns this around with his "But" in verse 41, showing that Mary, not Martha, had chosen the priority.

"On their way" (v. 38) is a highly significant phrase in this part of Luke, as discussed earlier. On their way of discipleship, Christians should heed Mary's example.

Looking clearly

Using all of the above, work out the passage's main idea and supporting ideas:

Main idea

Supporting ideas

²Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. 1993. *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* . InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Ill.

Try to summarise these in a clear, succinct statement:

Try to represent what the passage **says** and **means** with a drawing. No art show entries necessary! Invite *willing* people to explain their drawings, unpacking what is being said and the meaning.

Looking at Jesus

Doing this helps grow disciples of Jesus...

How has this study enlarged or enriched your understanding of Jesus and his claims, call and promises?

How do you respond to Him?

Looking in the mirror

Doing this helps grow disciples of Jesus...

What personal and corporate (your home group or church) beliefs you hold does this study confirm to be true?

What personal and corporate beliefs has this study challenged and corrected?

What personal and corporate values, attitudes and priorities has this study reinforced or challenged?

What personal and corporate behaviour and traditions has this study endorsed or challenged?

Looking forward

Doing this helps grow disciples of Jesus...

What encouragements, comforts and changes will you or your group take with you today?

Resolve to help one another move forward in repentance and faith.

Prayer and praise