

Listening to God

✦ Not doing for Him (vv.38-41)

✦ Sitting at Jesus' feet (vv.39,42)

In the name of Jesus, God's Personal Word, dear fellow servants:

One of the great mysteries of the Bible is what happened to the people's praises between Palm Sunday and Good Friday. Years ago when I preached on this, a visiting pastor corrected me: "You can't say the same people shouted, "Hosanna!" on Palm Sunday and then, "Crucify him!" Good Friday. So I asked one of our Seminary professors whether I was in error. His answer was classic: "You can't say it wasn't the same ones either." We really don't know. The Holy Spirit tells us one crowd came with Jesus and another poured out of the city of Jerusalem. The Kidron Valley between the Mount of Olives and Herod's magnificent Temple was ringing with praise: "***Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!***" (Luke 19:38) We do know all support disappeared. None of Jesus' disciples stood by Him on trial. Peter's clumsy sword play in the Garden still left him denying any knowledge of Jesus. They all needed a little lesson about **Listening to God** – first by...

✦ Not doing for Him (vv.38-41)

Back track east from those Palm Sunday crowds, over the ridgeline of the Mount of Olives, past the tiny village of Bethphage, until about two miles east of Jerusalem toward the Jordan River. A few weeks earlier "***Jesus and his disciples were on their way***" of His *Resolute Journey* to the cross (Luke 9:51 – 19:41). Jesus visited dear friends who are familiar in the Gospel accounts. But the little lesson they learned at home that day is not meant for the lazy and indifferent. People who come to church and drop their money but not their heart in the offering won't care much about this. American churches are riddled with folks who just want to be left alone to keep God at arm's length. They don't want to hear anything is wrong with them or about a Savior to whom they owe their life. Palm Sunday is exciting, Easter more so, but who wants the somber worship of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, dark days calling us to repent?

But if you are repentant, hoping for God's blessings in your life and His help in every need, giving your heart in praise, you will find kindred spirits in the home of Mary and Martha. Thank God for giving us the gift of faith with such holy hopes and desires. We can all relate to these two sisters.

It's a bit understated to translate: "***Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.***" Look in the kitchen window. See Martha shaking her head? "Where's Mary to help me!" she mutters. Through the living room window you can see the calm before the storm. Martha's arms are full as she walks around the corner. Then it feels as someone stabbed her in the heart. She's upset with Mary, but she's hurt deep and hard from Jesus. The Greek original pictures her standing over Him while He's sitting with Mary listening at His feet. Martha tries to be respectful, but you know how it is. "***Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!***"

You know how sometimes the more sure you're right the more wrong you become? Martha is a beautiful example of one of the main reasons our heavenly Father provides us with a place to live. He loves us, but He also wants us to "***practice hospitality***" (Romans 12:13) like Abraham (Genesis 18:1-8) the father of all believers. Abraham rallied Sarah and their servants while he personally served the three messengers many believe were Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Martha wanted her guests to feel at home, especially her divine Guest Jesus. So it was hurtful enough that her sister Mary ignored her. But Jesus? The more you care about someone and the harder you try to please them, the more it hurts when they seem to ignore you. Martha was tired and hungry and hurt. But while Jesus seemed too mellow to care, He was really teaching her and us a strange lesson about **Not doing for God**. Something else comes first.

This is why I'm so grateful for Jesus' kind hearted patience with me. Sometimes the most familiar stories like this one are the most challenging for the professional preacher. Only five verses of Greek, a fairly simple text study, and the sermon was written by Friday evening. But when I tried to email the forty-five-page study to *Preacher's Apprentice* subscribers, somehow the file corrupted along with all my backups. Long and short, most of Saturday was spent reworking the text study. And you know what? I really wasn't paying attention the first time. Unless my Lord raises the bar and makes life more difficult, I'm just a busy professional, growing calluses on the soul. **Not Doing for God** comes first with...

✠ **Sitting at Jesus' feet** (vv.39,42)

Martha's complaint sounds like Elijah at Mount Horeb: "...*I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.*" (1 Kings 19:14) Hardworking pastors, teachers, lay workers, parents, you know the feeling of trying so hard while others seem to just sit. Helpers sometimes disappear like Palm Sunday crowds. Like Elijah or Martha, you'd like a little thunder and lightning from God once in a while. But as with Elijah, so Jesus came in the "*still, small voice*" of the Gospel. He did not scold Martha's dedication, but He did correct her priorities: "*Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.*" His word for "*taken away*" (αφαίρεω) is used for "*cutting off*" the servant's ear in the Garden. But it's also used when God says, "*This is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.*" (Romans 11:27 NIV)

Luke seems to be emphasizing Mary knew she was listening to the Word of God in flesh and blood. Soon Jesus would prove Himself to be the best and truest Friend by raising their brother Lazarus from a four-day death sleep (John 11). **Sitting at Jesus' feet** brings surprising grace and blessing of God.

Martha accepted Jesus' lesson. But some argue, "How will any work get done if we're all **Sitting at Jesus' feet**?" Meanwhile, Americans spend millions on therapy and drugs, depression and violence. One bus driver in our parking lot slammed his window and drove away when I tried to answer his question by telling him this. But it's true. "*Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*" (Psalm 119:105) The student of God's Word is blessed in so many priceless, practical ways. While **Sitting at Jesus' feet** see the nail scars still there from the cross. Jesus is God's relief from guilt and frustration. His blood made that Friday Good and heals us in His Holy Supper with full forgiveness of all our sins. The "poor, wretched, blind" who come as they are to sit at **Jesus' feet** find "sight, riches, healing of the mind" (CW 397:4). All we need in Him we find. And best of all, we find God's one Way home to heaven.

"People have so many material distractions that keep the Word from being the organizing principle of life. The gospel occupies only one of the many cubbyholes in the mind and soul; work, pleasure, family, friends, even the sports page may have bigger cubbyholes. The gifts God intended to remind us of his goodness and generosity end up being ends in themselves; they cease being means to the end of grateful adoration and wholehearted commitment to him and to his Word. Those modern conveniences...could free up energy and time that could be devoted to the Word and to a life of service...Would that we received all things with thanksgiving, enjoyed them with a pure heart, and then used them to deepen our life with Christ and in service of one another!"¹

Whether your name is Martha or Mark, **Listening to God** means first, **Not doing for Him**, but **Sitting at Jesus' feet** like Mary. As we leave the home of these dear sisters today and follow our Savior with the Palm Sunday crowds, God grant us the resolve to keep our hearts with Him this Holy Week. Remember the advice of guest Pastor John Zeitler in 1995: "Let us not allow our doing for God to get in the way of what God has done for us."² This week we see what great things God has done for us. This week will be holy as we long as we are busy like Mary **Listening to God – Sitting at Jesus' feet**. Amen.

¹ Deutschlander, Daniel M. *THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS – Reflections on His Cross and Ours*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2008. Second, Third printings, 2009), p. 82. Order: 1-800-662-6022.

² Rev. John Zeitler in a guest sermon at New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church, Shoreview, Minnesota, 8/06/1995. This was quoted by a member to his pastor as a very helpful point in a sermon while the pastor was on vacation. [M.C. 3/26/2010]

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