

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:

2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

LUKE 10:38-42

<sup>38</sup> As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. <sup>39</sup> She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

<sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

<sup>41</sup> "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, <sup>42</sup> but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

TIME- IT IS SUCH A SERIOUS HUMAN CONCERN. IN MANY SOCIETIES, INCLUDING OUR OWN, PEOPLE ARE OFTEN OBSESSED WITH MEASURING TIME, OBSERVING TIME, HAVING TOO MUCH, OR TOO LITTLE TIME.

WE ALL ARE BORN INTO WORLDLY TIME, AND WE ALL DEPART FROM TIME WHEN WE DIE.

TIME MEASURES OUR LIVES WHETHER BY YEARS AND DECADES, OR BY THE VARIOUS MOMENTS OF LIFE WE EXPERIENCE.

WHEN IT COMES TO TIME PEOPLE CAN BE BOTH COMFORTED BY, AND EXASPERATED BY THE PERSPECTIVE OF TIME THAT IS RECORDED IN PSALM 90:4.

"FOR A THOUSAND YEARS IN YOUR SIGHT ARE LIKE YESTERDAY WHEN IT IS PAST, OR LIKE A WATCH IN THE NIGHT."

YES INDEED, WHILE GOD LIVES IN ETERNITY, WE WHO ARE ALIVE ON EARTH ARE GOVERNED BY TIME: SECONDS, MINUTES, HOURS, WEEKS, MONTHS, SEASONS, AND YEARS.

EVEN JESUS, DURING HIS EARTHLY LIFE, STEPPED OUT OF ETERNITY TO LIVE WITHIN THE CONSTRAINTS OF EARTHLY TIME.

THERE IS, HOWEVER, ANOTHER UNDERSTANDING OF TIME, BESIDES MEASURED TIME, AND THAT IS SITUATIONAL TIME.

ECCLESIASTES 3 IS REFERENCE TO THIS TYPE OF TIME, SAYING FOR 'EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON, AND A TIME FOR EVERY MATTER UNDER HEAVEN.'

ANOTHER OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCE TO SITUATIONAL TIME IS FOUND IN ESTHER, WHEN THE QUEEN HESITATES TO INTERVENE TO SAVE HER PEOPLE, AND SHE IS REMINDED GOD MAY HAVE MADE HER QUEEN FOR THAT VERY PURPOSE.

ESTHER 4:14 PROCLAIMS: "FOR IF YOU REMAIN SILENT AT THIS TIME, RELIEF AND DELIVERANCE FOR THE JEWS WILL ARISE FROM ANOTHER PLACE.

BUT YOU AND YOUR FATHER'S FAMILY WILL PERISH. AND WHO KNOWS BUT THAT YOU HAVE COME TO YOUR ROYAL POSITION FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS?"

THE GOSPELS REFERENCE SITUATIONAL TIME IN THE DECLARATION JESUS MADE: "THE TIME IS FULFILLED, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME NEAR, REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS."

JESUS REMINDS US IN THAT STATEMENT, AND IN OTHERS LIKE HIS WORDS TO HIS MOTHER "MY HOUR HAS NOT YET COME", THAT HE ALSO LIVED IN THE REALITY OF GOD'S TIMING.

A FREE METHODIST PREACHER, CHARLES MALLORY DESCRIBED THE CHRISTIAN LIFE USING A CLOCK.

"OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES CAN SOMETIMES BE LIKENED TO A PENDULUM CLOCK.

ONE DAY OUR FAITH SWINGS FORWARD IN ZEAL AND DESIRE, AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT OUR FAITH SWINGS BACKWARDS BY THE FORCES OF BUSYNESS AND DISTRACTIONS."

IDEALLY, BOTH OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES, AND OUR WORLDLY LIVES SHOULD BE A BALANCE BETWEEN THE TWO.

BUT OF COURSE-MAINTAINING A PERFECT BALANCE ON A CONSISTENT BASIS IS UNLIKELY, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE. SO PERHAPS ONLY JESUS WAS ABLE TO DO THAT.

KEEPING IN MIND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GOD'S TIMING AND THE HUMAN STRUGGLE TO USE TIME WISELY, LET US TURN TO TODAY'S GOSPEL STORY.

IT OPENS WITH JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES STOPPING AT THE HOME OF SOME FRIENDS. THEY VISIT WITH SISTERS MARTHA AND MARY, AND THEIR BROTHER LAZARUS.

THE ARRIVAL OF JESUS THERE WAS MEANT TO BE PRIVATE TIME WITH HIS DISCIPLES AND THE HOUSEHOLD, RATHER THAN A PUBLIC EVENT.

THIS IS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE OF THE FACT THAT MARY SAT WITH THE MEN TO LEARN FROM JESUS.

REMEMBER, WHILE JESUS, OR ANY OTHER RABBI TEACHING OR PREACHING IN A PUBLIC PLACE WOULD HAVE WOMEN PRESENT ALONG WITH THE MEN, PRIVATE TEACHING WAS DIFFERENT.

ONLY MEN AND BOYS WERE PERMITTED THE DEEPER LEARNING A RABBI, LIKE JESUS, WOULD GIVE IN PRIVATE.

MARY, STEPPED OUTSIDE THE BOUNDS OF RELIGIOUS TRADITION AND SOCIAL CUSTOM, WHEN SHE SAT DOWN WITH THE MEN TO LISTEN AND LEARN FROM JESUS.

MARY WAS MORE FOCUSED ON JESUS AND ENJOYING THE TIME HE SPENT WITH THEM IN THEIR HOME, THAN SHE WAS ON HERSELF, OR WHAT OTHERS EXPECTED OF HER.

MEANWHILE MARTHA WAS FRANTICALLY BUSY- PREPARING A MEAL TO HONOR JESUS, WITHOUT MARY'S HELP.

MARTHA WAS TAKING HER DUTY AS HOSTESS SERIOUSLY, ESPECIALLY SINCE IT WAS JESUS WHO WAS VISITING, WHILE MARY WAS SHIRKING HER SOCIAL DUTY.

WE MIGHT IMAGE WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN GOING ON IN THE MINDS OF THOSE PRESENT. MARTHA, AT FIRST WAS SILENTLY FUMING THAT MARY WAS NOT HELPING HER.

THE DISCIPLES WERE LISTENING TO JESUS, BUT ALSO WONDERING WHY MARY WAS ALLOWED TO SIT AMONG THEM. AND IF SOMEONE SHOULD POINT THIS OUT TO JESUS.

AFTER ALL, FOR MARY TO SIT AT THE FEET OF JESUS WITH THE MEN DURING A TIME OF PRIVATE TEACHING WAS WRONG.

MARY KNEW IT WAS WRONG, THE DISCIPLES AND LAZARUS KNEW IT WAS WRONG.

MARTHA CERTAINLY KNEW IT WAS WRONG-YET JESUS ACCEPTED HER PRESENCE WITHOUT COMMENT.

SO FINALLY, MARTHA REACHES HER BREAKING POINT AND SHE INTERRUPTS JESUS DEMANDING HE MAKE MARY HELP HER.

WE SHOULD NOTICE THAT MARTHA DID NOT GO TO MARY AND TRY TO GET HER ATTENTION AND DRAW HER AWAY.

INSTEAD, SHE ACCUSED JESUS OF NOT CARING ABOUT ALL SHE WAS DOING FOR HIM- BY LETTING MARY SIT WHILE SHE WAS WORKING, AND COULD OBVIOUSLY USE HER HELP.

BEFORE WE LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT JESUS' RESPONSE IT MIGHT BE HELPFUL TO THINK ABOUT WHAT THIS STORY IS NOT ABOUT.

ITS MESSAGE IS NOT ABOUT WOMEN'S RIGHTS VS MEN'S RIGHTS, NOR IS IT ABOUT WORK VS CONTEMPLATION.

IN HIS RESPONSE TO MARTHA, "MARY HAS CHOSEN THE BETTER PART...", JESUS WAS NOT MAKING A BLANKET PROCLAMATION.

HE WAS NOT IMPLYING THAT LEARNING FROM HIM IS ALWAYS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SERVING HIM, NOR THAT CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS LESS VALUABLE THAN LISTENING OR WORSHIP.

THE BIBLE IS CLEAR THAT SOMETIMES DOING FOR JESUS IS WHAT IS NEEDED RATHER THAN THINGS LIKE PRAYING, OR BIBLE STUDY, OR SPIRITUAL MEDITATION.

REMEMBER THE PENDULUM OF THE CLOCK MENTIONED EARLIER. BOTH EXTREMES ARE PART OF FOLLOWING JESUS.

LISTENING TO AND DOING FOR THE LORD ARE TWO PARTS THAT MAKE A WHOLE.

THE KEY TO THE STORY'S MESSAGE IS FOUND IN THE SAVIOR'S OPENING REMARKS TO MARTHA, WHICH IN A WAY, JOIN THE PURPOSE OF BOTH EXTREMES TOGETHER.

"MARTHA, MARTHA, YOU ARE WORRIED AND DISTRACTED BY MANY THINGS, THERE IS NEED OF ONLY ONE THING."

JESUS WAS SPEAKING ABOUT THE NEED TO MAKE TIME FOR HIM, AND THE NEED TO FOCUS ON HIM.

IT WAS NOT ABOUT WHETHER WE DO SO THROUGH ACTION OR BY SITTING AND LISTENING-BUT THAT WE MAKE TIME FOR HIM IN WHAT EVER WAY IS BEST AT THE TIME.

NOW, IT IS CLEAR MARTHA LOVED JESUS AND WANTED TO DO RIGHT BY HIM-IN PREPARING A BIG MEAL.

HOWEVER, SHE WAS SO FOCUSED ON HER TASKS AND HOW SHE HAD NO HELP, THAT SHE LOST HER FOCUS ON THE REASON FOR HER WORK-WHICH WAS SERVING JESUS.

MARTHA COULD HAVE FULFILLED HER OBLIGATION AS HOSTESS WITH A SIMPLE MEAL, ONE OF THINGS ALREADY PREPARED, GIVING HER TIME TO SIT AND LISTEN LIKE THE OTHERS.

OR SHE MIGHT HAVE LISTENED, AS BEST SHE COULD, WHILE SHE WORKED, OR THOUGHT ABOUT HOW THANKFUL SHE WAS TO HAVE JESUS AS A GUEST THAT DAY.

JESUS WOULD NOT HAVE SAID ANYTHING TO MARTHA ABOUT HER CHOICE, IF SHE HAD NOT GONE TO HIM COMPLAINING, AND IN OBVIOUS DISTRESS.

HIS ANSWER CONVEYED THE SENSE OF TIME THAT INDICATES THE TIME WAS RIGHT FOR SITTING AND FOCUSING ON JESUS.

FOR JESUS, THE MOST NEEDFUL THING AT THAT PARTICULAR TIME WAS FOR ALL OF THEM TO HEAR, AND SEEK TO UNDERSTAND, HIS TEACHINGS.

THEREFORE, MARY'S BETTER PART WAS HER SINGULAR FOCUS ON JESUS HIMSELF, IN THAT TIME AND PLACE.

SADLY, MARTHA WAS SO FOCUSED ON WHAT SHE WAS DOING AND HAD TO DO, SHE LOST SIGHT OF THE PURPOSE OF ALL HER ACTIVITY-WHICH WAS JESUS.

THIS CAUSED HER TO RESENT HER WORK AND MARY'S LACK OF HELP.

IT ALSO CAUSED MARTHA TO BECOME ANGRY WITH JESUS FOR NOT OBSERVING THIS, AND SENDING MARY AWAY.

THIS STORY MAY SEEM LIKE THE KIND OF EVENT THAT CANNOT BE REPEATED SINCE JESUS IS NO LONGER WITH US PHYSICALLY.

AND YET, IN VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES AND TIMES THE INCIDENT HAS BEEN, AND CONTINUES TO BE, REPEATED BY CHRISTIANS WHO FEEL OVER WORKED AND UNDER APPRECIATED.

“LORD, DO YOU NOT CARE THAT I AM DOING ALL OF THIS WITHOUT HELP?” WE MAY THINK IF NOT ACTUALLY PRAY.

AND THERE ARE TIMES SOME OF US, LIKE MARTHA, GET SO CAUGHT UP IN DOING THINGS WE THINK WE SHOULD DO FOR JESUS, WE GET BURNED OUT AND EVEN LOSE SIGHT OF HIM.

PASTOR MALLORY DESCRIBES THE PROBLEM THIS WAY: “IT IS GOOD TO WANT TO SERVE JESUS AS AN EXPRESSION OF OUR LOVE FOR WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR US.

YET, WHEN OUR ACTIVITIES CONSUMES OUR TIME AND ENERGIES SO THAT WE HAVE NO TIME FOR HIM. WE HAVE BECOME TOO BUSY LIKE MARTHA.”

I HAVE A PERSONAL EXAMPLE. BEFORE I WENT TO SEMINARY, I HAD DIRECTED SOME CHRISTMAS PAGEANTS AND EVEN A COUPLE OF EASTER PLAYS IN MY HOME CHURCH.

DIRECTING AND ACTING IN THEM WAS SOMETHING I BOTH ENJOYED, AND FOUND SPIRITUALLY FULFILLING.

THEN I BECAME A PASTOR, AND THE FIRST TIME I DIRECTED A CHRISTMAS PAGEANT WAS MY LAST.

LIKE MARTHA, I FOUND MYSELF STRESSED AND FEELING OVERWHELMED BY THE PLAY ALONG WITH MY OTHER WORK.

I REMEMBER WATCHING ONE PRACTICE AND THINKING ONLY ABOUT HOW GLAD I WOULD BE WHEN THE PLAY WAS OVER.

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, THE THOUGHT CAME TO ME THAT AS A PASTOR I HAD A DIFFERENT ROLE NOW.

OF COURSE, SOME PASTORS CAN DO BOTH, BUT MY EXPERIENCE, AND I THINK THE SPIRIT WITHIN ME, WERE SAYING THAT WAS NOT THE CASE WITH ME.

YOU SEE I HAD LOST SIGHT OF WHY I WAS DOING THAT PARTICULAR JOB.

ALTHOUGH I LOVED DIRECTING, IT WAS NOW DRAWING ME AWAY FROM THE LORD RATHER THAN CLOSER TO HIM.

THE PRESSURE OF BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PLAY, ALONG WITH WHAT I WAS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR IN WORSHIP, PULLED MY HEART AND MIND AWAY FROM JESUS.

THIS, I THINK, WAS SIMILAR TO MARTHA’S EXPERIENCE WHEN SHE FELT OVERWHELMED AND BECAME RESENTFUL.

SO, IN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION “LORD DO YOU NOT CARE?”, MAY SOMETIMES BE- “I DO CARE, BUT I NEVER ASKED YOU TO DO THAT PARTICULAR THING YOU ARE SO UPSET OVER.”

PASTOR MALLORY SUMMED UP THE LESSON OF THE STORY AND OFTEN OUR LIVES IN THIS WAY:

“MARY SHOWS US THAT THERE ARE TIMES IN OUR LIVES THAT NO MATTER WHAT IS PRESSING, WHAT IS DEMANDING OR EXPECTED OF US, THERE COULD BE NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN SPENDING TIME ALONE WITH GOD....”

AND THIS IS TRUE NOT ONLY FOR CHURCH WORK, BUT FOR ALL ASPECTS OF OUR LIVES.

LET US PRAY: ETERNAL GOD, YOU DRAW NEAR TO US IN CHRIST AND MAKE YOURSELF OUR GUEST. MAY WE BE LIKE MARTHA AND OFFER HOSPITALITY TO YOU, AS WELL AS FRIENDS AND STRANGERS ALIKE. AND MAY WE BE LIKE MARY LISTENING CAREFULLY TO YOU, SO THAT AMID THE CARES OF OUR DAILY LIVES, WE WILL BE ATTENTIVE TO YOUR VOICE AND ALERT TO YOUR PRESENCE. THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD WE PRAY. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: LUKE 10:38-43

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