

Luke 10:40

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.

Analysis

But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. The verb *periespāto* (περιεσπάτο, "was cumbered") literally means "to be dragged around" or "distracted"—Martha is pulled in multiple directions, fragmented by many tasks. The phrase **much serving** (*pollēn diakonian, πολλὴν διακονίαν*) describes legitimate ministry—diakonia (*διακονία*) is honorable Christian service—but here it becomes burden rather than blessing.

Martha's complaint reveals her heart: **dost thou not care** (*ou melei soi, οὐ μέλει σοι*) questions Jesus' concern and compassion. She feels unseen, unappreciated, abandoned—emotions common to those serving without rest or refreshment from God's presence. Her demand **bid her therefore that she help me** (*eipe oun autē hina moi synantilabētai, εἰπὲ οὖν αὐτῇ ἵνα μοι συναντιλάβηται*) attempts to enlist Jesus as enforcer of her agenda, commanding Mary back to kitchen duty.

Jesus' response (vv. 41-42) is tender but corrective: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part." Martha's problem isn't service itself but anxious, distracted service that crowds out communion with Christ. Ministry flows from intimacy; when reversed, it produces anxiety, resentment, and spiritual exhaustion. The danger for activists and servants is substituting work for God for relationship

with God. Jesus didn't need elaborate meals—He needed Martha's heart. Mary understood priority: worship first, service flows from worship.

Historical Context

First-century hospitality required extensive preparation, especially when hosting a rabbi and disciples. Meals were communal, lengthy affairs requiring significant food preparation, water for washing, proper seating arrangements. Martha's burden was real—hosting thirteen-plus men would require hours of labor. Cultural expectations placed this responsibility squarely on women of the household. Martha's frustration is understandable from a cultural perspective, making Jesus' response even more striking—He prioritizes Mary's spiritual formation over cultural hospitality norms.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does Martha's distraction reveal the danger of allowing good activities to crowd out the best priority—intimacy with Jesus?
2. What does Jesus' gentle correction teach about distinguishing between faithful service flowing from worship and anxious activity substituting for relationship?
3. In what areas of your life might you be serving with Martha's anxiety rather than Mary's restful devotion?

Interlinear Text

ἡ δὲ Μάρθα περιεσπάτο περὶ πολλὴν διακονίαν.
G3588 **But** **Martha** **was cumbered** **about** **much** **serving**
G1161 G3136 G4049 G4012 G4183 G1248

ἐπιστᾶσα δὲ εἰπὲ Κύριε οὐ μέλει σοι ὅτι ἡ
came to him **But** **and said** **Lord** **not** **care** **thou** **that** G3588
G2186 G1161 G2036 G2962 G3756 G3199 G4671 G3754

ἀδελφή μου μόνην με κατέλιπεν διακονεῖν εἰπὲ
sister **my** **alone** **me** **hath left** **to serve** **and said**
G79 G3450 G3441 G3165 G2641 G1247 G2036

οὖν αὐτῇ ἵνα μοι συναντιλάβηται
therefore **her** **that** **me** **she help**
G3767 G846 G2443 G3427 G4878

Additional Cross-References

John 6:27 (Parallel theme): Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

Luke 12:29 (Parallel theme): And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.

Matthew 14:15 (Parallel theme): And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.

Matthew 16:22 (References Lord): Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.