

“Clear eyes. Full heart. Can’t lose.” It is the slogan, the motto, the only pep talk needed for the Dillon Panthers, then for the East Dillon Lions, the star football teams on the TV show *Friday Night Lights*. I know, for a lot of you, probably for most of you, you’re like, a tv show about football? Hard pass. Not a touchdown pass, just a hard pass. But *Friday Night Lights* was about more than football; it was about life in a small town, about family, about pushing beyond the limitations you place on yourself, and about discovering who you are no matter what the world would try to define you as. In short, it was a revelation of a show.

The entire concept centered around Coach Eric Taylor who was the head football coach in a small Texas town, where few things mattered more than football. Football was life, but for Coach Taylor he wanted his boys to be more than just football players. He wanted them to be complete, whole men who grew up not only loving football, but loving themselves, their families, their town, and ultimately their dreams. He was the master of the pre-game, halftime pep talk. No matter what the circumstances, he knew what to say, but almost every speech ended the same way. Clear Eyes. Full Hearts. Can’t Lose. The whole point being when you are focused, when you’re dedicated, when you can see what’s in front of you clearly, you can’t lose. And sure, they still lost plenty of football games with that speech in

their heads, but the heart of it remained. Keep your eyes open, your head focused, put your heart into what you're doing, and no matter the outcome, at the end of the day, you can know win or lose, you did all you could, you lived into the moment, the play, the game, fully and entirely. Clear Eyes. Full Hearts. Can't Lose. It's not just a catchphrase, it's not just the name of my fantasy football team. It's a mindset, a mentality, a way of life, and I can't help but wonder if maybe Jesus would have used Coach Taylor's pep talk with Martha, his point might have come across a little smoother.

The reality is, these four short verses come with *a lot* of baggage and a lot of words of judgment that have sometimes been used in less than helpful ways, particularly when it comes to women and faith. So let's get a few misconceptions and difficulties out of the way, shall we? This story is in no way, shape, or form, Jesus condemning domesticity or work that has traditionally been described as "women's work." Please do not get me started on the association of women's work and the kitchen because that's a whole other story together, but we need to get that baseline established. So often this story is read as just a simply, straightforward condemnation of Martha, and while I wish nothing more than to be able to be like, "See! Even Jesus says chores are unnecessary!" That isn't the point. So, let's take condemning Martha off the table as we approach this gospel.

Let's also take off the table all of our misconceptions, assumptions, and frankly I'm sure some of our desires that Jesus had nothing to do with the idea of women serving in the kingdom of God, being disciples, sharing the good news. This text pretty much flat out obliterates all of the lies that history and frankly the church has tried to tell for too long that women had no place, no part with Jesus and his ministry. Here we have Mary sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to his teaching, surrounded by the rest of the disciples, and probably plenty of other men, and Jesus doesn't tell her to leave, to get out, to know her place. Jesus embraces Mary's tenacity and desire to hear the word of God, so all the junk we throw out there that women had no part with Jesus, is just that...junk.

So, now that we've gotten that out of the way, let's talk about what's going on here. Jesus arrives at Martha's house, which knowing what we know about Mary and Martha and their brother, Lazarus, tells us that he's in Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem. This also tells us that Martha is well off, an independent woman of means. This isn't described as Lazarus' house or their parents' house, this is *her* house, she is the host. She has the ability to host and support however many people have come with Jesus and nary a word is said about a man in her life supporting her. So here we are, Jesus outside of Jerusalem in the house of Martha, an independent woman and her

sister Mary, and things between the two of them are going about how things with siblings tend to go in high stress situations.

Jesus is in the front of the house with the disciples and whomever else has gathered, and being a woman of proper Jewish upbringing, Martha knows that hospitality is of utmost importance, and so she's bustling around to and fro, making sure people are fed, that things are cleaned up, that no one needs a thing. She's harried and distracted and frankly, a mess. All the while, there sits her sister. Mary is right there lounging on the floor with the rest of the party, rapt attention focused on Jesus. She doesn't seem to care one ounce for the hustle and bustle of her sister's stress in the midst of this party that has arrived on their doorstep. She's content where she is.

Who knows what the breaking point is, but suddenly, Martha cannot take it anymore. She does the only thing she can think to do. Jesus is sitting *right there*, and if anyone is going to back her up, Jesus would certainly provide some clout to her argument. "Jesus! Tell my sister to get up off the floor and help me! I'm busting my tail around here and she's sitting on hers!!!" She expects Jesus to support her, but instead, Jesus goes a bit Coach Taylor on her, but with what sounds like a bit more of a tinge of exasperation. "Martha, Martha...you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing." Then as every sibling absolutely

hates to hear when frustrated with their siblings, Jesus uplifts Mary's choice of activity and says she has made the right choice for the moment.

Now, again, remember we're taking the judgment of Martha off the table here. Jesus doesn't say, "Martha, your work is pointless! Stop doing chores!" He doesn't say, "Never show hospitality or pay attention to your guests again!" Jesus essentially says, "Clear Eyes. Full Heart. Can't Lose." Martha isn't seeing the situation clearly, her heart isn't full, it's divided, distracted, and it's making her lose, because she can't see the opportunity that is right in front of her. She can't see Jesus because she's so busy seeing everything else around her, thinking everything else is more important, instead of seeing what is truly important, instead of seeing that her sister is kneeling at the feet of the most important thing.

Martha's problem wasn't that she was doing chores or being hospitable. Martha's problem was that she failed to recognize the moment, she failed to read the room. Jesus points out to her the very real reality that distraction is so very easy, especially when it's distraction with *important* things, like making sure that your guests are taken care of, but sometimes distraction let's to clouded eyes, empty hearts, and a lose-lose situation. Jesus wants her to take a breath and realize that sometimes the other

important things can wait, because sometimes she needs to give herself space to breathe in, take in the moment, take in the time.

I think sometimes we're so harsh on Martha, because most of us see her as too glaring of an indictment on our own selves and so it's a bit of a thou dost protest too much situation. Oh, that Martha! So busy! So distracted! Can't she see Jesus is right there?! Can't she see that sometimes you just have to sit down!? I wonder how many of us those sentences, those questions could be applied to? I would imagine a lot of us. Probably more than a lot of us. How many of us have been so busy, so distracted that we haven't seen Jesus right before our very eyes? How many of us have been so busy, so distracted that we haven't even taken a hot second of time during the day to even *think* about Jesus, let alone see him? Think it's just you? Well, let me tell you what happened this past week.

I've shared before that we start all of our Pastoring the City meetings by asking one another the same question, "What is on your heart?" Somehow, with five pastors in the room, none of us could really come up with some deep, profound, emotional answer. So, one of my colleagues simply said the first way she could think to describe it, "My head is so full, I can't even begin to tell you what's on my heart." And we all sounded like Charlie Brown discovering he's afraid of everything, "THAT'S IT!!!" All

of us owned that yeah, in a world of distraction we had barely had time for anything else that week. Not ourselves, not our own heart's needs, not God. It was a startling reminder, especially considering what we all knew we were preaching on this weekend.

I wish that I could say that there was an easy answer, that I could say, I, the pastor, have the profound answer to ignoring the distractions of this life and tending to my heart and soul when it needs it and always getting it right, but I don't. The world we live in, the lives we have created are undeniably busy and distracting. We are so jam packed full of places to be, things to do, errands to run, that the distractions of the world seem like the most important thing. And it is far too simplistic to simply say that they aren't, but...the better point is that sometimes we all need the reminder to read the room. We have to give ourselves space to breathe, to be, to pray, to exist with God, in all the forms that God arrives in our lives. If we live our lives distracted, our souls become fragmented and our hearts aren't content, and we tend to wonder why, when the simple answer is honestly, we need a little more Jesus and a little less chaos. Jesus is all around us if we're willing to press pause on the stress and distractions and see him. Jesus is all around if we're willing to live our faith with a little bit of Coach Taylor in mind. Read the room. Clear Eyes. Full Hearts. Can't Lose. **AMEN!!!**