

Grace Notes

Functional Atheism vs. Selah

5.26.10



***"...Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made....
[Jesus said to Martha], 'Mary has chosen what is better.'
Luke 10:40-42***

Sociologist, Parker Palmer, coined the phrase "*functional atheism*" while writing his book, *Let Your Life Speak*. Palmer explains that the "*never stopping/always doing*" lifestyle can, if we're not careful, begin to convince us that "*I am what I do my worth comes from my functioning.*" He continues, "*It is more important to be a 'human being' rather than a 'human doing.'*"

Ouch. And that, in part, is exactly what Jesus was trying to tell Martha.

Possessing a strong work ethic is a good thing. It's just that Martha's idea of hard work, without her even recognizing it, had become who she was. (The enemy is sly isn't he?) But, just as with the *Rich Young Ruler*, the *woman at the well* & *Zacchaeus*, Jesus always knew how to see to the heart of a matter. He immediately saw that Martha's identity was not in Him, but in what she *did*. She'd become a "functional atheist." And that's why Jesus looked through Martha's eyes and into her heart and said, "*Mary has chosen what is better.*" (An interesting side-note: *Martha was extremely critical of Mary, even asking Jesus to scold her: "Tell her to help me!" When we're out of fellowship with Jesus the "Pharisee" in us all rears its ugly head.*)

Selah—no one knows for certain what it means. You'll find the word sprinkled throughout the Psalms. Most scholars believe it's an ancient musical term for some sort of "rest." I heard one pastor define it as, "*stop and think about that for a minute.*" The Amplified Bible renders it, "*pause, and calmly think of that.*"

The 19th century preacher, Charles Spurgeon, describes "*selah*" as "*that solemn, stately, peaceful note of rest that keeps the soul in tune.*" I like that. He adds, "*it would be well if all of us could say 'Selah' (like Mary)....[but] too often we speak [or work] in our haste (like Martha) ...we strike [the instrument of our soul] with a rude crash, and mar the melody of our life-song.*"

It is important to note that a spirit of "*selah*" can exist in us within the busiest of days. It's when the busy-ness begins to *define* us & become our identity that we begin drifting off course.

In the story of Martha and her sister, Mary, God gives us a crystal-clear picture of "functional atheism" and "*selah*" at work. Martha chose the former while Mary chose the latter. Jesus said, "*Mary has chosen what is better.*"



Which are you choosing?

Soli Deo Gloria, Nick