

ONE THING NEEDFUL

Luke 10:38-42

INTRODUCTION

- When I was a child growing up, we were told that computers and technology would make our lives simpler, requiring us to work less, and giving us more time for leisure
- But if anything, technology seems to have made our lives even busier
- While God made us to be active and to work, it is easy to become imbalanced, allowing the busy-ness of life to crowd out the important things
- Stress-related illness, marriage breakdown, alcohol and drug addiction, are just a few of the terrible consequences of getting our priorities wrong in life
- But the spiritual ramifications are far greater
- The Lord Jesus described the “cares and riches and pleasures of this life” (Luke 8:14) as things that “choke the word” and make the word of God of no effect in the heart
- Many people are in hell now, or will be in hell soon, because they were “too busy for religion”
- There are many *unessential* things in our lives – things we can do without, and things we are probably better off without
- But then there are *essential* things, altogether necessary things, without which, life becomes difficult, or even impossible, such as food, clothing, shelter, etc.
- In this text, the Lord Jesus presents to us the one thing needful for life, peace and happiness
- Today, we consider the familiar account of the Lord’s visit to the house of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus
- The certain village was Bethany, located on the eastern slope of the Mount Olivet, about two miles east-south-east of Jerusalem, and on the road to Jericho
- Our Lord Jesus, when he was here upon earth, was so poor that he was necessitated to be beholden to his friends for a subsistence
- There were some who were Christ’s particular friends, whom he loved more than his other friends, and them he visited most frequently
- He loved this family (John 11:5)
- It is thought that Martha was the eldest, a widow, and the housekeeper
- Note a “certain” village, and a “certain” woman – there are no “uncertainties” with God
- We are constantly confronted with divinely appointed circumstances, divinely ordained meetings, where God is giving us opportunities to act on his behalf, but too often we don’t see it

- It is truly life transforming to approach every moment of your day with the attitude, “God has a purpose in what is happening right now, and I have a role to play in it.”
- In Martha and Mary, we learn about the importance of balance in our spiritual life
- We must not be so active as to neglect communion with the Lord, nor become so contemplative as to neglect our service

I. THE CRITICISM OF MARTHA

A. Distracted in service

1. This was proper, necessary service
 - a. We are to labour diligently with our hands (Ephesians 4:28)
 - b. We are to be hospitable (1 Peter 4:9)
2. It was service to the Lord Jesus himself
3. Yet her focus was turned away from the Lord to the work she was engaged in
 - a. It is easy to engage in Christian service, merely for service sake
 - b. The Ephesian church was working and labouring patiently for Christ, yet they had left their first love (Revelation 2:2-4)
4. The word “cumbered” (*periespato*) is literally “drawn/dragged around”, indicating distracted with anxiety
5. Cares “choke the word” and make us unfruitful (Mark 4:19)

B. Irritated with actions of others

1. She came to Jesus – a good thing
2. But she came with her selfish complaints and demands (cf. James 4:3)
3. A symptom of a defective heart is a focus on the faults of others, while overlooking one’s own faults (Matthew 7:1-5)

C. Irritated with her Lord

1. She not only rebuked her sister unfairly, but she even rebuked Jesus
2. Her mind and judgment were clouded
3. She presumed to instruct the Lord (cf. Isaiah 40:13)

D. Rebuked by the Lord

1. Gently – “Martha, Martha” showed his deep concern for her state.
2. The rebuke was not to say that she should *never* minister to others, and must *always* sit at Jesus feet

3. He rebuked her for fussing, fretting and worrying over her service, for her fault-finding, and for serving when she should have been listening to him
 - a. Martha had both inward anxiety and outward agitation
 - b. We are to be “careful for nothing” (Philippians 4:6)
 4. The *many things* she was troubled about were *needless*, while the *one thing* she neglected was *needful*
 5. She expected the Lord to rebuke Mary for not doing as she did, but he rebuked her for not doing as Mary did
 6. “Inordinate care or trouble about many things in this world is a common fault among Christ’s disciples; it is very displeasing to Christ, and that for which they often come under the rebukes of Providence. If they fret for no just cause, it is just with him to order them something to fret at.” (Matthew Henry)
- E. One thing is needful
1. The “one thing” is not salvation – Martha had saving faith in Christ
 2. But she had allowed the many lesser things to distract her from the one chief thing of devotion to Jesus Christ

II. THE COMMENDATION OF MARY

- A. Her posture
1. This is a position of security and safety
 2. It is a position of rest (Matthew 11:28-29)
 3. It is a position of peace
- B. Her place – at Jesus feet
1. It is a place of submission
 2. It is a place of protection
 3. It is a place of learning
 4. Note that Mary is always found at Jesus’ feet
 - a. She found comfort there at her brother’s death (John 11:32)
 - b. She brought her worship there before Christ’s death (John 12:3)
- C. Her pursuit – hearing his word
1. She realised that man lives not by bread alone, but by every word of God (Luke 4:4)
 2. We are to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19)
- D. It is the one thing needful

1. It is *needful* not optional
 - a. Without it, we are spiritually barren
 - b. Only this one thing can provide us with any good in this world, and truly prepare us for the next world
 2. It is *one* thing
 - a. That is, it is the chief, the first, the principal thing that we should seek above all others (Matthew 6:33)
 - b. This should cause us to focus and prioritize this one thing in our lives
- E. It is one thing *chosen*
3. This does not happen accidentally or naturally
 4. It is a deliberate choice (Joshua 24:15)
 5. Choosing the good part means refusing the other parts
- F. It shall not be taken away
6. Many things we do in this life will amount to nothing in eternity
 7. But what we do in love for Jesus Christ will abide beyond the grave, will pass through the fire of judgment, and endure for eternity

CONCLUSION

1. The one needful thing that will meet every human need in this world, and eternity, is also the most neglected and rejected thing in the world (John 5:40)
2. Have you cast yourself at feet of the Lord Jesus, as a helpless sinner, trusting in his blood for your salvation?
3. Every day, we choose what priorities govern our lives
4. Are you as Martha, cumbered with busy-ness of daily life?
5. Or are you as Mary, choosing to make time to worship Christ?
6. Mary chose to devote herself to communion with the Lord
7. Time in prayer and reading/studying the word of God is not optional, it is needful for our spiritual growth
8. Many of the choices we are faced with in life are not between what is bad and good, but between what is good and best
9. Those who choose this good part will be criticised, not just by the world, but even by fellow-believers
10. But the commendation of Jesus far outweighs the criticisms of man