

OUR GREATEST NEED IN LIFE

Luke 10:38-42

Intro: This account in the life of our Lord is only recorded for us in the Gospel of Luke, and yet it is one of the most important for all of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ. It took place following a time when the Lord had rebuked several cities for their hardness of heart, and when He had faced a lawyer whose purpose was to trip the Lord up in His teaching. The “certain village” was Bethany; the home was that of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus -- a home where the Lord was always welcome, and where He loved to be. The “certain woman” upon whom Luke would focus our attention, is Martha. She gladly received the Lord Jesus into “her house,” which was where all three of them lived.

The secondary figure in Luke's account, was Mary. What she did was highly commended by the Lord, but the main purpose of the account is to tell us about the Lord's ministry to Martha. Lazarus may not have been home at this time.

You can imagine what an exciting time it must have been for the whole family when the Lord Jesus paid a visit to their home, even though His visits may not have been very long. He was not there very long before Mary seated herself at Jesus' feet to hear His Word. That is, she wanted Him to teach her.

Martha, on the other hand, evidently had the responsibility of preparing the meal for the Lord. In true feminine fashion, she wanted everything to be right, and she did not want to delay the Lord any longer than she could. Luke tells us that “Martha was cumbered about much serving.” The NKJV, the NASB, and the NIV all translate the word “cumbered” as meaning distracted. This is the only time that this word is used in the NT. It means that she was so concerned about preparing the meal and getting it on the table that she couldn't think about anything else. As a result she was distressed and burdened down with a ministry that should have given her great joy. And she felt that it would have been a delight if Mary had only been helping her instead of sitting on the floor at the feet of the Lord listening to His teaching.

However, she was not quiet about what was bothering her. She spoke, not to Mary, but to the Lord, and seemed to blame Him for taking such a time to teach Mary. And it looked to her like the Lord was not aware of what she was doing because He was so intent Himself on teaching Mary.

So she said to Him, “Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?” What she meant was, didn’t it matter to the Lord at all that the whole job of preparing the meal had been left to her? And then she said, “Bid her therefore that she help me.” Many, many times, I am sure that hundreds of times the verb that Mary used is translated in the Gospels with a simple said. But occasionally it is translated command! And this is what Martha meant. She was telling the Lord to tell Mary to get up and help with the meal. Perhaps some time had gone by, not long, but long enough for Martha to be very agitated with both the Lord and with Mary.

The Lord’s response to her was very gracious. I wish I could speak with the tenderness that our Lord must have said, “Martha, Martha.” And then He told her what was wrong. The problem was not with the Lord. Nor was it with Mary. The problem was with Martha. And then the Lord went on to say, “Thou art careful and troubled about many things.” The NIV says that Martha was “worried and upset about many things.” The NASB translates it, “worried and bothered.” The NKJV reads, “worried and troubled.”

I think that most of the time that we read this account we assume that the Lord was rebuking Martha because she was just overly concerned about the meal she had to prepare, and that Mary was not helping her. But reading the forty-first verse carefully we can see that the Lord was saying that He knew she was like this about many other things. If you could have visited the home of Mary and Martha at that time you would have found that Martha was very impatient with Mary in almost everything! Martha’s life was full of anxieties and worries, and as a result she was “troubled,” she was distracted. She was pulled in many directions. Life had become a burden to her. She never was able to do what she wanted to do, and she was more than a little inclined to place the blame on the people who were around her -- even on the Lord, as we have seen. And when we feel that the Lord doesn’t care, and that He lets things roll along day after day in the same way, then we are really in trouble.

The Lord knew what her problem was, and that this was not just an exceptional incident in her life.

Then the Lord told her how things could be changed. And in doing so He seemed to add to her burden. He pointed to Mary as having what she, Martha, needed. Listen to how it is translated in the NASB:

But only a few things are necessary, really only one, for

Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10:42).

The Lord was not rebuking her for preparing a meal of Himself. That was commendable. On more than one occasion the Lord had fed thousands of people. No, the problem was that her life had become so full of so many things that the one thing that she needed the most had been neglected, and so everything else had become a terrible burden upon her.

I mentioned to one of our men this morning when we were talking about the busy-ness of life, that a pastor I knew many years ago had a saying framed on the wall of his study which said, "Beware of the barrenness of a busy life." Life is full for all of us. It always has been and it always will be. And the things that need to be done, such as preparing meals for a lady, a housewife, a mother, is one that has to be taken care of.

But the problem is not just a woman's problem. Men face the same predicament. We get our lives so full of things which seem necessary to us that we get edgy, and hard to get along with. And we are inclined to blame our wives, our children, our jobs, or whatever. However, what we need, is what Martha needed. The problem was not the Lord. It was not Mary. The problem was in the heart of Martha herself. Perhaps Mary could have been more helpful. I am not excusing her. But the Lord did say that Mary had chosen that good part which would not be taken away from her.

What was that good part? As all of us begin a new year, what should have the greatest priority among the many things that we have to do? We all have our responsibilities, and these have to be taken care of. But we are all inclined to take on extra things, and what makes matters even worse for us, we get so busy that the easiest thing for us to neglect is our time with the Lord.

Through life our responsibilities change. Our children grow up, and marry, and have families of their own. And we don't have those responsibilities any more. But there is one thing that must not change -- and that is what Mary was doing. There must be time for personal fellowship with the Lord, time when we, too, can sit at His feet to hear His Word. Perhaps we have been faithful in reading our Bibles every day, but it has become more of a routine. We have forgotten that reading the Word is meeting with the Lord. We fail to ask Him to show us what He wants us to see in His Word -- and so we miss many blessings.

Or it might be that we have been neglecting the Word. We like to come to hear it taught, but we haven't been paying much attention to our Bibles during the week. And we have been carrying our own burdens instead of taking them to the Lord, and laying them upon Him like He wants us to do.

So what does this mean for us? It means that whatever else we have to do, our time with the Lord must have the greatest priority. We need to be with Him, to hear His Word, and to pray, more than we need anything else. It is reported that Martin Luther used to say, "I am so busy, I must pray."

It may be that we need to cut off some of the things that are non-essentials in our lives. The writer of the book of Hebrews said that in order to do a good job of running the race that the Lord has set before us, we need not only to lay aside our sins, but we need to get rid of every weight that is inclined to keep us from running the race. What are your weights? What is there in your life that keeps you from a daily time alone with the Lord, in His Word, and in prayer.

Wouldn't you like to know what Martha did about the changes that needed to be made in her life? I would. But you know, the Lord holds His dealings with us very confidential. I am inclined to think that she did change. And possibly Mary saw that there were things that she could do to help Martha so that she would not be an offence to Martha, and that Martha would have the time that she needed to spend with the Lord.

The important thing is for us to listen for ourselves to a passage like this. These are the words that the Lord spoke to Martha, but Mary was listening, and she needed to make the application to her life. Now tonight we have read it. And it is recorded here for our benefit. We are not to be critical of Martha, but we are to ask ourselves if what had happened to Martha, has happened to us.

Many years ago we had the Director of the China Inland Mission in our home. He was speaking at Central Bible Church. And we were all getting ready to go to the evening service. Our children were young then, and so I was helping to get them ready, plus making sure that the house was all locked up. I think that the senior missionary, a godly man, sensed a need that I have. As we went to the front door ready to leave, he stood in front on me, grasped me by the shoulders, and said, "Now brother, let your heart down." I have thought of those few words hundreds of times

since then when I was acting like Martha -- “Now brother, let your heart down.”

I will confess to you that there have been many times in my life when I have been like Martha, careful (full of care and anxious) and troubled about many things. And I have always found that my need was to get with the Lord, sit at His feet (so to speak), and let Him minister to my heart.

As we begin 1996 let's examine our own hearts. What place does the Lord have in our lives? What is most important to you, sitting up late to watch TV, or getting to bed at a decent time so that you can meet with the Lord the next morning? Which is most important to you, reading the morning newspaper, or reading the Word? Do you begin the day with the Lord, and then continue walking in fellowship with Him throughout the day. The Psalmist said, “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them” -- nothing shall make them stumble. Cf. Psa. 119:165. How do we show that we love the words of the Lord? Again, the Psalmist said, “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psa. 119:97).

Some of you will remember Joe Kopp who used to teach at Multnomah. He and I often had lunch together. He would open my office door, and stick his head in and say, “Isn't it time for us to go out and have a hamburger together?” And I never turned him down if I were free. When we were sitting at the table, he would say something like this to me: “Brother, what verse in your Bible did you underline this morning?” Or he would say, “What did the Lord have to say to you today when you read His Word?” Joe knew what was that good part that could not be taken from us. Shortly after Joe was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and it wasn't long before he was with the Lord. But whenever I underline a verse in my Bible, I think of Joe and wish I could tell him what verse it was.

Nothing is more important for any of us, young, middle aged, and old, than that day by day we take time to wait quietly on the Lord, reading His Word so He can speak to us, and then opening our hearts and our mouths as we speak to Him. This is the good part. May it be your good part and mine also as we enter a new year of fellowship with the Lord.

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