

# But One Thing is Needful

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Let us worship God. We shall sing to his praise from Psalm 116, and reading at verse 7.
- O thou, my soul, do thou return unto thy quiet rest. For largely lo, the Lord, to thee, his bounty hath expressed. For my distressed soul from death delivered was by thee.
- Thou didst my mourning eyes from tears, my feet from falling free. I, in the land of those that live, will walk the Lord before. I did believe, therefore I spake. I was afflicted sore.
- I said when I was in my haste, that all men liash be. What shall I render to the Lord for all his gifts to me? I'll of salvation take the cup. On God's name will I call.
- I'll pay my vows now to the Lord before his people all. Dear in God's sight is his saint's death. Thy servant, Lord, am I.
- [ 1 : 1 3 ]     Thy servant sure, thine handmaid's son. My bands thou didst untie. We'll sing these verses, six stanzas, from verse 7, Psalm 116.
- O thou, my soul, do thou return unto thy quiet rest. O thou, my soul, do thou return unto thy quiet rest.
- For much may thou, Lord, to thee, hast thou found it out of the rest.
- For my distress, O thou, my soul, do thou, my soul, do thou, my soul, do thou.
- I am the land of those who have been with what the Lord behold.
- [ 2 : 5 3 ]     I did believe them all I think. I was a bleached soul.
- I said when I was saved by his that all men liars me.
- What shall I render to thy Lord for all this truth to me?
- I lost salvation. Take that cup. On God's day when I fall.
- I'll pay my house now. I'll pay my house now to the dark king for his people all.
- [ 4 : 1 7 ]     Dear God's day when I fall. Dear God's day when I fall. I'll pay my house now to the dark king for his people all. My servant, Lord, to the dark king for his people all.
- Thy servant should lie on his heart. My bonds of distant time.
- Amen. Let us come before God in prayer. Let us pray. Lord God, we give thanks that we can draw near at the throne of grace and that we can lift up our voices in magnifying your name by way of praise or prayer.
- That we do so even when we turn to your word and when we fix our heart and mind upon your word with the intention to enter into your presence with your word upon our lips.
- And there to discover still greater truths about the God that you are.
- [ 5 : 4 6 ]     A God that we have met, many of us, and a God that has met with all of this world.
- It is the case that the day will come when we must answer to you, the throne of grace, the throne of judgment. And those who do answer will have no way of denying the fact that you have met with them in this world because you have appointed your agents to speak of your glory.

Even these things that are around us that speak of the handprint of our God who is creator. The earth beneath our feet, the sky above us, the stars, the moon, the sun, the ocean and all that is contained therein.

Despite man's best efforts to belittle this creation and say that it has inadvertently come into being.

And to declare that as something that is the result of many years of corruption and development, both together creating the beauty and splendour of the natural world.

[ 7 : 20 ] We see the reasons given and extending into millions, even trillions of years that allows this process of evolution to take place.

And it is supposed to explain everything. And it denies your world which tells us that God created this world. You, oh God created it in the space of six days and all very good.

On the seventh you took rest and counseled your creature who was created in your image to rest on that seventh day.

And to avail themselves of the provision that you took place. We give thanks for this Lord's Day. It allows us to take time to worship and take time to focus our hearts and minds on the things that pertain to your glory.

Help us this day to have a sense of glory, even as we are entertained by it. Entertained in the sense of being taught through it.

[ 8 : 38 ] Entertained in the sense of our spirit being, of our soul, of our mind, of the very essence of our being.

Being taught of the things of God. And we give thanks that you have allowed us such access into the mind of God that allows us to understand things that only by so doing that we could.

So help us to worship. Help us to draw near. To bow the knee. To acknowledge Christ as the Lord. To acknowledge that he is the alone saviour of sinners.

To acknowledge that he is the way of access that we have even to this throne of grace. So bless us in his name today. Encourage us to wait upon him.

That he by his spirit may guide us in the things that are to your glory. We give thanks for the way in which the psalm that we have been singing.

[ 9 : 48 ] It reminds us of your servant the psalmist's love for God. A love for you that arises out of the knowledge that you have given to him of yourself.

Upon the name of God he said. Then did I call and say deliver my soul. And having experienced that deliverance.

Having experienced that salvation. He was able to declare to all and sundry God merciful and righteous. He is gracious. He is our God.

Nothing but your grace could allow us to entertain any hope for time or for eternity. We pray your blessing upon your people this day the world.

We are thankful that there are many of them. Not only in our congregations but in congregations throughout the world. We pray that you would bless them. And remember all the missionary activity of your church.

[ 10 : 51 ] We remember those who have gone out with your word to various places. And we are thankful for the grace that you have endowed them with.

We think of Muriel McLeod for example. We pray for her where she labours away from her home and family. And we pray that you would bless her time with the people that she has so much time and affection for.

We are mindful of other missionaries throughout the world. Many that we don't know anything about. Many that may feel their isolation and their separation.

But we pray for them. We are mindful of a family of believers that are mourning a loved one at the present time.

One who was a missionary for many years in Southern Africa. We bless you and thank you for life spent in mission and with an interest in mission.

[ 11 : 58 ] And her place in the history of our own church. And when you write the account that is to be set before the lives of all who have lived in this world.

We know that there are many who will have good things said of them. And that because they have lived in the light of your own countenance with a beautiful glory.

So we remember the grieving and the sorrow. We pray for those who are at this time unwell. We remember those who belong to our own congregation here. We pray for those who are being treated in hospital or at home.

We are mindful of the needs that many have that can only be dealt with with great skill. You are the one who is the great physician.

But you undoubtedly endow others with these skills. And we give thanks for that. We pray that any such would know your own hand upon them.

[ 13 : 11 ] Sustaining them body and soul. And enlightening them to the interest that you have through Christ in their lives. Be merciful to those who have cares and concerns for them.

Whoever they may be. Be they mothers or fathers, sons or daughters. We pray that you would remember them. So we pray that you would remember us as a nation at this time.

And all the nations of the earth. As we continue to experience the effects of the pandemic. While there is clearly evidence of a slowing down of the impact offered.

Yet there are also evidences through the world of a resurgence of this disease. As it changes and as it comes in forms previously not known.

So we pray that you would keep us. And that you would protect us. That you would remember those in this island who have suffered in recent times. Sanctify your dealings with us.

[ 14 : 16 ] That our eyes would be open to the fragility of our humanity. And to the understanding that we are but creatures of time. And our short sojourn in this world.

Will come to an end. The need that we have to be ready. For in such an hour as we know not the Son of Man will come. That is what you encourage us to believe.

So bless the word that is read and that is preached. Bless those who hear it. We give thanks for the prospect of places of worship being opened again.

But we understand that there are implications for that. And we pray Lord that you would overrule for good in all things. Guide us in the truth as we turn to read it.

And bless it as we hear it read. And as we reflect upon it. Grant mercy for our many sins. And cleanse in the Redeemer's name. Amen. We are going to hear the word of God as we have it in the New Testament Scriptures.

[ 15 : 28 ] And from the Gospel of Luke chapter 10. And reading at verse 25. And behold a certain lawyer stood up and tempted Jesus, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

And he said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest thou? How readest thou? And he answered. And he answered. He answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself.

And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right. Thou shalt do, and thou shalt live. But he willing to justify himself said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

And Jesus answering said, And a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

[ 16 : 54 ] But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him he had compassion on him. And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him, whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee.

Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Now it came to pass as they went, that he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.

She had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. 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?

[ 18 : 12 ] Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.

But one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her. Amen, and may God add his blessing to this reading of his word, and to his name be the praise.

I would like us to turn to this chapter that we have read, and we are looking at the last part of it. The account that we have here, thereof Jesus' visit to the home of Mary and Martha.

From verse 38 onwards. Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.

I used to see in many homes a small plaque with the following inscription written on it.

[ 19 : 34 ] It reads, Christ is the head of the home, the unseen guest of every meal, the silent listener to every conversation.

And I often thought of what these words meant, and in particular what the Lord was witness to in my own home, and at all points of my life.

I never forgot these words. Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, who as God is omnipresent, present everywhere and at all times, with no exceptions.

And this is a Bible truth declared by the Psalmist in those so encouraging words to the believer. Where shall I go from thy spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

[ 20 : 48 ] There are, of course, many other passages that contain the same truth. I don't want to, in any way, undermine the reality of the truth of which this speaks.

To demean it in any way. In fact, many to this day rejoice in the experience of being made aware of the presence of the Lord.

Jesus, in a way that they cannot deny or ever forget, whether this was an experience that they enjoyed in private or that they shared with others.

The passage before us, however, describes a rare experience enjoyed by a very few people that was curtailed to the few short years of Jesus' earthly ministry.

However, many shared his company, or enjoyed his presence, is necessarily limited by his short life. And any information we have about it is found within the Gospel narrative.

[ 22 : 03 ] And in this specific instance, only the Gospel of Luke contains any information about it. So what is described is indeed a special occasion.

And we can begin with a few general comments about the place that Jesus presents himself in. Secondly, I want us to consider the difference that there is between how Martha and Mary respond to their guest.

And thirdly, how we are meant to understand the Lord's comments. Now, some suggest that chapter 10 is all about discipleship.

It begins with Jesus sending out 70 to preach the coming kingdom of God. We read in verse 7, for example, that they return with joy.

They are, as it were, flushed with success. But Jesus brings them back down to earth with the words that remind them that the true priority for all is that their names are written in heaven.

[ 23 : 18 ] David Jackman writes, he takes them away from activity for him, back to their relationship with him. And I think this thought is brought home to us in the way the Lord deals with Mary and Martha here in this short account.

We are told that Jesus is probably accompanied by his disciples. We are told that the house is the house.

We are told that the house is the house of Martha and that she had a sister called Mary.

In the Gospel of John we read of Mary and Martha and a brother called Lazarus, whose home was in Bethany.

In chapter 11 John specifies that Bethany was also the town of Mary and Martha. For that all three shared the same home is not stated, as far as I can make out.

[ 24 : 38 ] But that is not important. What is important is that Jesus has come into their house as a welcome guest. Now the second thing is this, we notice that despite being sisters they were very different.

Mary we are told sits at Jesus' feet and heard his words. In John chapter 12 we have yet another scene where it may be hard to identify whose house they are in or whose home they are in.

But again we find Martha serving and Mary anointing the feet of Jesus. The thing to note is that in all likelihood Jesus was not a stranger to this house.

The writer and preacher R.C. Sproul suggests that the last six months of Jesus' life that he would have visited Jerusalem periodically and he would have made this home his base.

Truth be told a lot is left to the imagination. And many indeed do make use of that imagination.

[ 25 : 59 ] Douglas Millen suggests that Martha went to prepare a lavish meal. Of course we are not told one way or the other. Whatever it was that kept Martha busy.

And was the kind of busyness that kept her from doing what Mary was doing. Which was sitting, hearing what the Lord had to say. We can only imagine how big the house was.

If the kitchen was separate from the sitting room. Or if the dining room was the kitchen, dining room. Or the sitting room was the dining room.

All of these things are left to the imagination. Some would describe for us the layout of a typical house of that generation.

But one thing is true. Martha was busy. And it was a busyness that required her attention. The ESV uses the word distracted.

[ 27 : 04 ] And we sometimes use the word multitask. But it seems it was not possible to include the domestic chores with hearing the words of the Lord.

There is no doubt the scripture means us to capture the image. The busy Martha and the sitting Mary. It seems plain that Martha has given what she is doing a priority.

And not only that, she is of the opinion that it should be Mary's priority as well. We are not told that she is struggling to do what she is doing.

But she does feel that her sister should be with her. And not only do we register a rebuke to Mary in her tone.

But also a rebuke of the Lord. She asks, do you not care? I would say that this statement shows that Martha had got things wrong.

[ 28 : 15 ] If there is one person in the whole world that cares, it is the Lord. But when we are not getting our own way, it is easy for a spirit to be generated that finds fault with anything and anyone.

Martha was certainly in the grip of that spirit. Now it is easy for us to find fault with Martha at this point. And Miss Caller.

It is however a fault arising out of our own priority. There are a great many people who are genuinely busy for the Lord.

But as we have already noted, it is not what we do for the Lord that is important, but where we are with the Lord. Mary was sitting at his feet hearing what he had to say.

Whether this was a word of counsel or encouragement, a word of correction or commendation, Martha could not receive it because she was too busy to hear.

[ 29 : 30 ] This is what the answer of Jesus is all about. He shows that he cares for Martha. Theologian suggests the double use of her name highlights his affection.

But he knows the things that are creating concern to her. You are careful and troubled about many things, he says. But they should not be things that keeps you away from me.

In whatever capacity we serve the Lord, there is always the danger that the nature of the service may keep us from him. As a minister, we often hear and read about advice that is appropriate for ministry.

I will read words such as words addressed to Christian leaders. Many live lives that are totally undernourished and virtually exhausted spiritually because so few Christians today make the priority of Jesus their priority.

To sit at his feet and listen to what he says. And fewer still obey what he says. Many would accuse some of idleness.

[ 30 : 58 ] Surely it can't be true of Mary. The late Reverend John McKeever, minister in Carlow, speaking in the words of our text, reminisced about a woman who he knew, probably before he came to faith himself, but a woman he knew to be godly, who told him that she considered it a token from the Lord, even spending time with Christian friends who came visiting her home.

She would have such Christian liberty in the discussions of spiritual things that she would not manage to do as many of her daily worldly tasks as other days.

You might think that's a strange measuring stick. But the way she saw it, the more of the presence of the Lord that was enjoyed, the less import was given to the mundane things of the world.

Jesus says one thing is needful. And Mary has chosen. If you read this last verse, verse 42.

Mary has chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her. These words have been variously interpreted.

[ 32 : 17 ] Some suggest that Mary is converted and Martha is not. At least not yet. I cannot believe that that is the truth.

For example, Thomas Boston suggests that what must be meant by the words of the Lord, the one thing needful is the care of the soul by means of Jesus.

Therefore, Martha is like those who are immoderately thoughtful about their life, what they shall eat, what they shall drink, and wherewithal shall they be clothed, and so on.

What we can say is that Jesus said something about Mary's choice. He said, it is a good choice.

That good part. The SV translated, the good portion. The New English translation, the best part. If we simply contrast what the two were doing.

[ 33 : 22 ] One was doing something that was considered better than the other. John McAver says, and I agree with him, I have no doubt that Martha was a believing woman.

But her spirit was not what it ought to have been. If Martha at some future date were asked the question, Is there anything you regret about the occasion spent in the company of Christ?

I would suspect that she would regret not spending the time in his company. There are many ways she could go on serving him, doing good in his name after he was gone.

But it would not be possible to recover the time not spent in his company. I often think of Thomas, the disciple. He was missing when Jesus revealed himself to his brethren.

And he missed out on that moment of ecstasy that these others experienced and shared with others, which could not be replicated.

[ 34 : 39 ] That moment was once and once only. Yes, Thomas mercifully received sight of the risen Lord. And it was very clear to him who the Lord was and what was true of him.

But it was not the same as what was experienced originally. There is culpability here. A choice was made and repercussions followed.

Mary would have no reason for regret. Whereas Martha may have such a regret. When we think of these words, we have to remind ourselves of the danger that there lies in being possessed by such a spirit.

Where we are envious of what others are doing when we compare what they are doing to what we are doing.

We may give more import to what we are doing as opposed to what they are doing. We must guard against such a spirit in case we are wrong about our observations, as Martha indeed was, with regard to the position occupied by Mary at the feet of the Lord.

[ 36 : 03 ] There are many ways in which we can serve the Lord. And we should do all in our power to fulfil our calling, whatever that calling may be.

But we should never overlook the fact that the greatest service we can offer the Lord is by sitting at his feet.

By pouring over his word, by allowing his word to fill our heart and the sense of his presence to be a portion. Not one of us can afford to neglect that, even in the pursuit of duty.

May God encourage us to consider the privilege that these women enjoyed. And that we should seek it for ourselves that Christ indeed would be that person who is the guest in our home.

Already welcome awaiting him at all times. May God in his mercy bless his word to us. Let us pray. Lord, we give thanks for the words of Scripture that bring us into so many different situations.

[ 37 : 18 ] That are situations that are blessed indeed. We pray that you would remember our congregations, remember our people, remember them in all the situations that mark them out at this time.

Bless our homes, our families, our hospitals. Bless our parliaments. Bless our royal family. Be merciful to us as our people. In a difficult time, cleanse from sin.

And now may grace, mercy and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.