

Only One Thing is Necessary for Us

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Assembly

Introduction:

Imagine your house caught on fire in the middle of the night. The smoke is getting thick, the heat unbearable. You have time to get only one thing and take it out with you. What would it be? I imagine I would die in that fire because I would wake Marita up and send her out the window, but then I would have three very important items to find and get out of the house, they have been in our family for 9, 7 and 4 years respectively. Questions like this are intended to challenge us and our values. How valuable is the computer or entertainment center when placed alongside saving our kids? Yet, how much time do we spend with our computer or entertainment center versus with our kids? These kinds of questions force us to see what is really important, what matters and what is necessary. In like manner, Jesus challenges us to see what is really important. **Luke 10:38-42** throws the gauntlet down. We know the story of Mary and Martha. Martha was anxious and troubled by so many things that she was distracted from the one necessary thing. Mary, on the other hand, chose the one good thing and that would not be taken from her. You see, the world is on fire (or will be, **II Peter 3:10**) and we only have time to carry one thing with us. Will we grab the right portion?

Discussion:

- I. What is the one necessary thing?
 - A. Mary pursued the one necessary thing. But what exactly is that? Is it merely listening to Jesus teach? I don't think so. Rather, because Mary pursued the one necessary thing, she listened to Jesus instead of doing housework.
 - B. We could turn to numerous passages to build a case for the necessary thing. We could turn to **I Timothy 1:5**, which shows the aim of our charge is love issuing from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. We could turn to **Matthew 6:33-34** to talk about seeking first the kingdom of God and not being anxious about other things. We could turn to **John 4:34** to talk about letting the Father's will be our food. However, the passage I think most demonstrates the one necessary thing is **Philippians 3:7-14**.
 - C. What did Paul consider the absolute one and only necessary thing? Knowing Jesus Christ. Why? By knowing Jesus we can enter and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of our own, but having the real righteousness that comes by faith in Him. When we know Him, we know the power of His resurrection and may attain our own resurrection from the dead.
 - D. Think about it. If the only thing absolutely necessary in your life is knowing Jesus, what would you do if He were in your house teaching? Would you be up setting the table and positioning the bathroom towels or would you be at His feet listening. Mary wanted to know Jesus. Mary wanted the resurrection. Why would she do anything other than listen to Jesus when He was teaching? What if she missed something important? The dishes could wait, but listening to Jesus could not.
- II. Distracted.
 - A. Martha couldn't focus. A friend recently pointed out the use of a particular word in **vs. 40**—"distracted." Martha's problem was not being focused on the wrong things. Martha wanted to know Jesus. Martha wanted the resurrection (*cf.* **John 11:24**). Her problem was being distracted from the right thing. Allow me to illustrate. One of the worst things for my marriage is televisions in restaurants. The problem is when I take Marita out to eat, I need to focus on her, listen to her, converse with her. I never go out of my way to ignore her and I certainly care about her. However, I am easily distracted by the television. Then I hear those words fatal to any evening out with my wife, "You didn't hear a word I just said, did you?" It is not that I am focused on bad things; I was distracted from the right thing.
 - B. Martha wanted to know Jesus too. However, every time she started to focus on Jesus her timer went off or she remembered she needed to put out the towels or she realized she still needed to butter the rolls. Martha's anxieties distracted her. I can almost hear her thoughts. "If that Mary would get up off her lazy backside and help, I could get done quicker and listen to the Master, too. I just have too much to do to sit around. If I were trying to listen, all I could think about is all this work anyway."

- C. What distracts us? Money, work, a clean home, our children's education, retirement, pleasure, sports, television, graduating, assignments from teachers, assignments from bosses, keeping up appearances, our weight, our health, our cars, our computers? Are we anxious and troubled about many things? Or are we focused on the one necessary thing?
- D. Please carefully notice Jesus' words to Martha. He said, "One thing is necessary." He did not say, "One thing is allowed." Martha was not wrong because she had concerns about her role as host. We are not wrong because we have concerns about money, work, a clean home... We are not wrong for taking time to complete projects assigned by our bosses or watching television. The problem is when any of these things distract us from the one necessary thing. Let me tell you my big distraction today. The next season of *24* starts tonight at 7pm. We have a colossal two episode premier tonight, followed by two episodes tomorrow night and I can't wait. But there is a problem. We assemble from 6 to 7pm. Maybe I could cut tonight's sermon short. But then you all are going to be hanging around here wanting to visit and get to know one another. Maybe I could leave as soon as the invitation song is finished. Maybe I could get the elders to move our assembly to 4 o'clock. Or maybe I could just develop a colossal headache between now and then and "not feel well enough to get out." Granted, this is not a big deal because I can DVR the show. But what if I couldn't? What if tonight's assembly meant I wasn't going to see the first episode of my favorite tv show? What if the assembly means I miss the Super Bowl? What if the work of this congregation means I can't have certain jobs because I won't be able to work with the church? What if my need to study the Bible and pray means I miss out on something I really like? What if it means I don't get to watch certain shows, go certain places, be involved in certain activities. When I was in high school, I loved being involved in plays. I would love to do it again. What if focusing on the one necessary thing means I never get to be involved in another play in my entire life?
- E. There are a lot of good things out there that threaten to distract us. But only one thing is necessary. We must maintain our focus on knowing Jesus.

III. Everything else will be taken away.

- A. Mary chose to listen to Jesus. He said that would not be taken from her ever. Martha chose to clean house. Now, ladies, you tell me. What was going to happen to Martha's clean house? She was just going to have to clean it again when Jesus and the apostles left. Why be distracted by what is temporal and transient from what is eternal? Consider the principle of **I Timothy 4:8**. Physical exercise is profitable. There is nothing wrong with it. You ought to do it. But godliness is really profitable. It has a promise for this life and the one to come. Don't misunderstand, I am not justifying my lack of health. But the numbers of people who spend hours a day keeping their bodies fit but don't have time to read their Bibles have a problem. They are distracted from the one necessary thing and what they are focusing on will be taken from them.
- B. Have any of you visited Martha's house? It is not even standing today. We don't even know where it was standing. Right now, 2000 years later, does it matter one bit that Martha cleaned her house on that day? Do you think it matters right now that Mary listened to Jesus on that day? This was the message of **Ecclesiastes 1:4-11**. **Ecclesiastes 2:18-23** explains we can work all day and then our works will be destroyed by those who come after us. Our work seems so important but even rulers of the world are forgotten and their works lost. Consider the poem **Ozymandias** by Percy Bysshe Shelley, which tells of a man traveling in Egypt. He sees a broken down statue whose inscription says, "I am Ozymandias, look on my works ye mighty and despair." The traveler looked around and saw nothing but barren desert. Ozymandias was Ramses II. He had been one of Egypt's greatest building Pharaohs. But what is left of his work? Most people today don't even know who he is. All that great work was taken from him.
- C. Finally, consider **II Peter 3:10**. If Martha's house was still standing and stood to the end of time, what is going to happen to it? It will burn up with the rest of the world. That house won't go into eternity with Martha. But the lesson's Mary learned from Jesus will go into eternity with her. How many of our great achievements will last into eternity? Our diplomas, our gold, our homes, our cars, our computers, our trophies, our certificates, our buildings, our everything will be burned up on the final day. When Mary and Martha stand before God in judgment, based on that one occurrence, which one will have something to take with them?

D. Think of this simple test. When we stand before God in judgment, which things will have mattered? When Alexander the Great stands before God, do you think God will care that he conquered half of the known world? When Benjamin Franklin stands before God, do you think God will care that he discovered electricity, invented the stove and started the post office? Will God be awed by Franklin's mental prowess and ambassadorial accomplishments? When Thomas Edison stands before God, do you think God will care that he invented the light bulb? When Thomas Jefferson stands before God in judgment do you think God will care that he wrote the Declaration of Independence? Don't misunderstand. There was nothing wrong with these men doing any of these things. The problem is, to my knowledge, none of them worked on knowing Jesus. We look at them as great men. They are statesmen and leaders we strive to emulate. But from an eternal perspective, nothing they accomplished is doing them one bit of good. When you stand before God in judgment, about what will He care? About what will you care? Will you point to your house? Your job? Your cars? Your degree? Your savings? In the eternal picture none of these things matter. Knowing Jesus and being found in Him having a righteousness that came by faith and therefore attaining the resurrection is all that will matter.

IV. Focusing on the one thing.

- A. If knowing Jesus is the only thing necessary, how do we accomplish that? First and foremost, *develop habits that introduce you to Jesus.*
1. Bible reading, study, meditation and memorization (**Psalm 1:2**). Talk about the Bible to others and teach it to whomever you can.
 2. Pray regularly (**I Thessalonians 5:17**). Someone has said the difference between modern and classical man is modern man has replaced morning prayers with the morning paper. In our day and age, it has gone even further to be replaced with the Morning Show.
 3. Attend the assemblies (**Hebrews 10:25**). We can argue all day long about how many assemblies you really have to attend and never accomplish anything. But you tell me, what do you think Mary would be doing when the saints are assembled? Why? Because she had to? Because she had to mark that off her checklist to get into heaven? No. Because only one thing is necessary and that is knowing Jesus. Why would she be anywhere but with the assembly when the saints are assembled? Why would we?
 4. Spend time with Christians outside the assembly, spiritually and socially (**Acts 2:46-47**).
- B. *Prioritize.* As we learned from **I Timothy 4:8**, physical exercise is good, but godliness should take more priority. It is good to keep up with the stock market, the political happenings, the current events, but will any of those things help you in eternity? Leave the newspaper in the bag, the tv and radio off, the internet shut down until you have worked on knowing Jesus. Make knowing Jesus a daily priority. Prioritize and schedule the habits you need to pursue to know Jesus. "But I just don't have time for all of this." You have now struck on the essence of what this passage is all about. As we have learned before, we have enough time to do anything we want, but not enough time to do everything we want. If you don't have time to know Jesus, then you need to cut something else out of your life. Please believe me, there will come a time when you will wish you had. **Matthew 5:29-30** is all about this. You need to cut off everything that distracts you from knowing Jesus. As you prioritize, don't let the urgent replace the important. Martha's role of hostess was urgent because Jesus was right there in her home. But listening to Jesus was more important. No doubt, in her mind she could always listen to Him later but she might not get another chance to play hostess to Him in her home. She had to make this one count. But she chose unwisely.
- C. *Don't let the world get you down.* When we prioritize our relationship with Jesus, the world will think we are weird. Let's face it, when we simply take half measures of Christianity like avoiding the bars and sexual immorality or attending the assemblies once a week, they think we are weird. But if we go so far as to spend hours a week even a day praying, studying the Bible, singing praises, they are going to think we are all out crazy. They will mock us. They will criticize us, even subtly, laughing because we can't be involved in their conversations about current events or the latest happenings on television. They will make fun of us if we don't know much about football or are not that educated in secular education. As long as you are choosing the necessary part, then don't let the world get you down.

D. *Don't let your brethren get you down.* Interestingly, Mary was not rebuked by a passer by from the world. She was rebuked by Martha. Frankly, in my experience, I have taken less heat from the worldly who expect me to be weird than I have from distracted brothers and sisters in Christ. For instance, I have never once been attacked by someone in the world for attending Sunday night assemblies. I have, however, been ridiculed and attacked by distracted brethren who legalistically believe they are ok because they attend the Sunday morning assemblies and feel it is unnecessary to worship with and edify brethren on Sunday night (I am not talking about congregations who only have one assembly on Sunday). I don't believe I have ever been attacked or ridiculed by those in the world for choosing not to watch certain television shows or movies, or for those periods when I removed television from my life altogether. I have, however, been attacked and ridiculed by distracted brethren who felt they needed to justify their actions. I have never been attacked or ridiculed for my standards of modest dress and deportment by people in the world. I have however been ridiculed for being prudish and Victorian by my own distracted brethren who have been more interested in dressing in modern fashions than in modest ones. Sadly, I have never been ridiculed or attacked by the worldly for my belief that drinking alcohol or playing the lottery violates the scripture. In fact, my experience in college was the worldly appreciated my conviction even if they disagreed with me. I have, however, been attacked and ridiculed by distracted brethren who want to fit in with society a little more readily for being too traditionalistic, archaic and just plain boring. Do you get the picture? Further, when I have been attacked and ridiculed by the world, I was not so discouraged as when I was attacked and ridiculed by distracted brethren. I appreciate that everyone who is focused on knowing Jesus will not look just alike and will not necessarily make all the same decisions or hold the exact same standards as I have just discussed. However, folks focused on knowing Jesus will not ridicule or attack others for their stands and decisions that seem more extreme. In any event, no matter who is ridiculing or attacking, if we are choosing the only necessary part of knowing Jesus, we know that will not be taken from us. We must not let even our distracted brethren get us down.

Conclusion:

Only one thing is necessary for us. Yet Satan is working hard to distract us from it. How subtly he diverts our attention away from knowing Jesus. Are you focused on and prioritizing the one necessary thing of knowing Jesus and, therefore, being found in Him with a righteousness that comes from faith, knowing the power of His resurrection and attaining your own? What is distracting you? Think eternally. Is it worth it? Let's all focus on the one necessary thing and grow together, lifting one another up, stimulating one another to love and good deeds.