

One Thing is Necessary

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Bible Text: Luke 10:38-42
Preached on: Sunday, January 1, 2017

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This morning, we're going to open up to a very familiar passage. It's in the book of Luke and it's in chapter 10, starting in verse 38, and it's familiar but don't let its familiarity cause you to brush over the details. I would venture to say the approach to it is not as obvious as we generally think of it. So before we get into this and before we dive into explaining it, I want to read the passage and then we're going to pray and ask for God's help and then we're going to dive in. So Luke 10:38-42,

38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Let's pray.

Father, we know that you have given us your word, that it is perfect, that it will do the work that you have set out for it. And Lord, we know that we need your help to not only understand it but to believe it and to remember it, to grasp its implications and to follow, to obey, for it to truly change our heart and our life so that we would honor you and we would do what you have called us to. So Lord, I pray this morning that your word would be effective in the hearts of everyone here today, that no one would leave without it reorienting our desires and our priorities. Lord, help us today, assist us, be honored in this body I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, so Luke 10:38-42. Martha and Mary. You've heard it probably 100 times. You know, you've read it and there is one key phrase at the very end that I think really we need to grasp and we really need to understand coming out of this passage and it is this, verse 42: that one thing is necessary. One thing.

Think about that for just a second. Literally Jesus says, "one thing is necessary." What do you consider necessary for your life? What could we say? Well, food. Shelter. Clothing. I need health insurance. I need a good job. Some would say that you need self-esteem, that you need to have your love cup filled, that these are needs, right? And unless I have these needs, I cannot be happy, satisfied. I cannot be expected to function properly and well. I can't be expected to obey the Lord. But Jesus says right here that there is one thing that is necessary. What is that one thing? What does he mean? Because if you look there, he doesn't actually say what it is. He leaves it to us to discern from the text.

So that question has to stick in our mind as we go through this passage: what is the one thing that is necessary and how does this passage illustrate what that is? And as we get into this, we need to examine the specific passage, the surrounding context and really the flow of the whole book of Luke because the book of Luke was written not to be taken in little chunks. If you read it straight through, it would take you maybe an hour. It's like a small pamphlet. Do you read pamphlets one paragraph at a time? If you want to understand specific passages in the Gospels, you've got to read the whole book and the lessons of the passages start to become more and more clear the more that you read, the more you understand the whole passage.

I remember the first time that I preached this. This passage was actually the first passage that I preached in front of a church and the first time that I preached it I thought the point was that you need to have a relationship with Jesus, that's the one thing that's necessary; that the lesson is, "Don't worry, just relax and hang out with Jesus. You know, spend some time with him. Go do your devotions." I thought that's what the point was. And it's easy to see why we would think that but the problem was is I preached it a few times after that and every time I kind of go back and re-examine that lesson is found nowhere else in the book of Luke. Nowhere in the book of Luke does it say, "Hey, when people come to Jesus he says, 'Do you know what you need to do? You need to go and take a break, relax.'" You know, do you ever hear Jesus saying, "Relax. Just relax. Go sit somewhere and read." Is that ever what he says? It's interesting, why doesn't he say that? I mean, I'm not saying don't go read your Bible. That's not the point. What I'm saying is that is typically how we take this passage but that's not the point. That's not what he's saying. So to understand that, how are we going to figure out what he means, what he's trying to say here? Well, let's walk through it and it will become clear as we kind of expose ourselves to the whole book of Luke in selected portions.

So let's go ahead and walk through it and the way that I like to walk through a passage is we're going to stop at phrases and words and walk out those phrases, okay? So someone said that it's like whiplash listening to me preach because we're up and down, up and down. I'm sorry but that's just how we're going to do it until I figure out a better way.

Verse 38, it says, "Now as they went on their way." So right now we want to see what the context is, right? It says, "Now as they went on their way." Well, they are going somewhere. Where are they going? And who is "they"? Well, if you look back at chapter 9, verse 51, it says this, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face

to go to Jerusalem." This is talking about Jesus and when it was getting close to the time for him to be crucified and then raised again, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

"And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered," and he goes and this is his habit is sending messengers ahead, letting people know that the Lord is coming. This particular passage, he sent it to some Samaritans and they didn't want him to come but this was his typical mode between now and when he is crucified, is he is set to go to Jerusalem, he is sending messengers out ahead of him.

You see in verse 57, "As they were going along the road, someone said to him." You see, they're going. They're moving somewhere. They're on their way to Jerusalem.

Chapter 10, verse 1, "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go." So Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and he is recruiting more and more disciples to send out as heralds ahead of him and where are they going? Into every town and place that he was about to go.

And this is what he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful," verse 2, "but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you." Basically if it's somebody that is willing to listen to the word, that's a son of peace, okay?

So now, verse 7, "remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them," this is what he says, "'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" This is the message: the kingdom of God has come near. This is what they're going into every village ahead of him saying, the kingdom of God has come near. He's not saying, "All right everyone, there is going to be a marriage conference coming up. If you want to improve your relationship, show up at such-and-such a time." That's not the message right now. That's not what they're going about doing. He's not saying, "All right, anyone that needs help with parenting or there is going to be a comic conference, bring your best outfits, costumes." No, that's not the message, right? The point is the message is about the kingdom of God and it being near.

Verse 10, "whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town," the town that rejected you. Again, this is the context. These are the things that he's saying as he is on his way to Jerusalem.

Verse 13, I mean, look at this, to the towns that rejected Jesus, "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago. But it will be more bearable in the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you shall be brought down to Hades. The one who hears you hears me." Okay? Key. To hear. To hear the message. To listen and obey it.

"The one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects the one who sent me." Okay, this is not a nice benevolence tour, you know, this is an urgent matter. The kingdom of God has come. If you reject it, the result is that you will be in Hades and your judgment will be worse than that of Sodom. Man, that's a hard message and that's what these disciples are going to these places and saying to the towns that they come across, "The kingdom of God is near. You'd better be ready."

Okay, so now verse 17, "The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!'" So they went out to all those towns, they healed the sick, cast out demons, proclaimed that the kingdom was near. So they gave demonstrations that the kingdom of God truly was coming. It wasn't just a bunch of guys making some crazy claims. They were actually showing that this is true. "We're healing people and we're casting out demons." Okay, so if this is happening, "Okay, Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming. The King is coming. I need to get ready."

So they came back rejoicing and Jesus says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you." But verse 20, look at this, "Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Okay, we're starting to get a clue as to what does Jesus value, what should be their priority, what is the thing that is the most valuable thing. Okay? The kingdom of God is coming. "Oh, we did all these amazing things, Jesus." And Jesus says, "That's great but don't rejoice in that, rejoice that your name is written in heaven because that is not just a given. Just because you're an Israelite, just because you heard the message, it doesn't mean that your names will be written in heaven." That is the most important thing.

Look at what he says here, verse 21, "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit." So this is what Jesus is rejoicing in. "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will." Look at that. The kingdom of God is not revealed to everyone. Not everyone will value it and treasure it. The wise, the understanding, those who think that they are wise, those who think they really understand, those who are proud in their hearts, it will be concealed from them and given to the humble. That's what Mary says when she praises God after she finds out she's going to have the Messiah, "You have exalted those of humble estate and brought down the mighty." "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

"Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will." Verse 22, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' Then turning to the disciples he said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.'" This is what the prophets and kings of the Old Testament longed for. They looked for this. They didn't know who it was going to be or when but they longed for this day when the Messiah would be here to bring the kingdom of God. These are the sorts of things that Jesus is saying as he goes along his way.

So then we get into the parable of the good Samaritan and the question is: what shall I do to inherit eternal life and that's the question. What shall I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus is saying, "That is the thing that you should rejoice in, that your name is written in heaven. The kingdom of God is coming. Not everyone will get in." This guy says, "What must I do?" And he tells him that, "You need to be righteous. You need to show love towards a man like a Samaritan." You need to love like that Samaritan in the parable of the good Samaritan. Of course the answer is that no one is that righteous. No one loves like that. You're getting more desperate. More and more desperate.

So now we come to and we could go on and on, I don't have time to expound this even further and to show you even more passages in Luke that show you the urgency of salvation, the priority of it above everything. Now, verse 38, "Now as they went on their way," they were on their way to Jerusalem and this is what they were doing. They weren't just wandering around having a good old time. They were on a mission and the mission was to proclaim the kingdom of God.

So this town, verse 38, "Jesus entered a village." This village was one of the villages that he had sent at least two disciples to and apparently is one of the ones that didn't reject them but instead received them.

They received the disciples and now right out in front, "a woman named Martha welcomed Jesus into her house." She welcomed him, unlike his enemies, unlike so many others who rejected him. She welcomed him. But there is a contrast here in this passage. There is a contrast being made between Martha and Mary; between what Martha thought was valuable and what Mary thought was valuable; between what Martha did and what Mary did. And it's fascinating. If you didn't get Jesus' response in verses 41 through 42, whose side would you be on? Would it be Martha? Look, hospitality in the ancient Near East was a huge deal. It was a matter of honor. I mean, if you were not hospitable, you were shameful. You would be shunned. She's doing her duty. This is her house. Jesus is in her town.

Think about this, the most important person in history that all of history has been waiting for and building towards is here. "What am I going to do to honor him? I'm going to welcome him into my house. I'm going to have dinner ready for him and his disciples and we've got to have water and we've got to have a place to sit and we've got to have maybe

a fire. We're ready to go." You know what it's like, right, to put together about 300 dishes to host people in your house, is that a calm thing? If I told you that I was going to bring, okay, the most important person, Jesus, but then his disciples were there too, at least 12, probably the ones that had wives and children and maybe all the other people that were following him too. Who knows how many people were there. You might have 100 people coming over and she welcomes them into her house and they don't have microwaves or gas grills, they don't have refrigerators. They've got to pull water up out of a well. They've got to knead the dough by hand, grind it up, make the dough, stoke the fire to get that going. If I told you I was coming to your house today with the most important person you could think of and I won't pick one just to avoid controversy, what would your response be? Well, you're going to run around and get this thing ready, right?

Well, do you think Mary probably felt that way too? Mary is the sister. She probably started off getting things ready. Okay? This is a matter of extreme importance but look at what Mary does, verse 39, "a sister called Mary, sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching." She is sitting there at his feet in the midst of this.

Okay, so there she is sitting but, "Martha is distracted with much serving." I mean, there are a couple of points to make here. It's already 12, isn't it? Sorry, guys. I'm going to do this real quick. Women at this time period were never considered disciples of the rabbis. They weren't allowed to sit in the room where the teaching was going on, or if they did, it was in the back or in another room. It was not acceptable in that culture at that time, not to mention that she is forsaking her duty of hospitality. You see, this isn't just her being lazy, she is ignoring the scorn and the shame that would be associated with her neglecting these other responsibilities to be there. Something more than just being interested or liking Jesus has to drive you to do that. This isn't just a little walk with Jesus. There is some sort of desperate drive that would cause someone to do that and I would just invite you to take a look at the rest of the book of Luke and see the sorts of things that Jesus says, but we're going to finish this out really quick.

Martha was distracted. That means pulled about, dragged around, with much serving. She's not dragged around, she's not pulled about, she's not distracted by stealing or gossip. She is distracted by something good, something that we are actually called to do, to serve one another, so that's not the problem, the problem is not in her serving.

"She went up to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care?'" I mean, she really believes that she is right because she interrupts Jesus in the middle of his teaching. She goes right up to him and interrupts it and says, "Do you not care?" She's saying this to the Lord. This is probably the first time that she's met him, by the way.

"My sister has left me to serve alone." Well, she's assuming that he's going to agree with her. "Yes, of course you do. Of course you didn't mean to have her sit there."

"Tell her to help me then." And the Lord as he so often does, turns it on its head and doesn't answer the way that you expect him to.

He says, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious," that means to care deeply. When it's in a negative context, it's translated anxiety. When it's in a good context, it's talking about like Paul being concerned about the church or caring deeply for the needs of the saints.

"You care deeply and you are troubled," turned up in your spirit, turbulent inside, "about many things." Okay, now look at his reasoning here. He doesn't say, "You just need to relax, Martha." The point here is not, "Don't be anxious," he says, this is the reasoning, "You are anxious and troubled about many things," lots of things, "but there is one thing that is necessary." The point is that there is one thing that you need to be this concerned about right now. What is that? It's the kingdom of God. It's eternal life. And if you look through the rest of the book of Luke, it's this: those who hear the word of God and keep it, "Those who hear my words and are not ashamed of them, those who hear my words and do it are like the man that built a house on the rock. When the flood came, it does not shake. The ones who hear my words and do not do them are like the man who built his house on the sand and when the flood came," he says, "great was its fall." Those who hear the word of God and do it, those are the ones who inherit the kingdom of God according to Jesus. Those who hear his words. The parable of the sower, Jesus says at the very end the different seeds are cast, right? They hear the word and they have different responses: some are choked out by thorns and thistles; some are taken away by Satan; some faith is basically burnt to a crisp by the tribulations and trials and persecutions of life; but then there is one that bears fruit with endurance, that is the one seed, the one soil that exemplifies a believer and his point at the end of that is: take care how you hear. You see, if the King is in your courtyard, why are you in the kitchen? If he is giving you the words of eternal life, why are you working right now for food that perishes? You need to go and get in there and find out what it means to get into the kingdom. You need to move heaven and earth to do that. Jesus said that the Queen of the South will rise up in judgment against this generation because she traveled from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and he says, but now one greater than Solomon is here and you refuse to listen and believe.

The one thing that is necessary is that you are in the kingdom; that you know Christ; that you hear his word. The only way to know is to hear his word, to believe it and to do it. That's where your devotions come in because you want to know for yourself what it means to be a Christian, not what R. C. Sproul says about it and not what everyone else thinks about it but what Jesus Christ actually says and what you must do to be saved. That's the question. And John says this is the will of God, that you believe in the Son and you trust completely in him.

Now, there is so much more to flesh out. This doesn't complete everything and all the questions but we need to stop. But here's the thing: Mary chose the good portion and it will not be taken away from her and if you choose the kingdom of God, it is the one thing that will not be taken from you. Your health will be taken. Your family will be taken. All of your possessions will be taken. If you choose the kingdom of God and lay up treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. That's what you will desire.

So, sorry to go over time. Let's pray and ask that the Lord would stir in our hearts to follow hard after him, to hear his word and to follow.

Lord, in this new year as we are thinking and reflecting on the past and looking toward the future, Lord, I pray that our resolution would be that your Gospel and your kingdom would be our priority and that we would resolve to know Christ, to make him known, that that would be our priority and prayer for others. And Lord, help us, convict us and strengthen us to follow you, Lord, and to do whatever it takes because that is what we truly need. And help us not to get confused and distracted and troubled about many things. Help us today, Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.