

The One Necessity

When the lawyer (or Bible scholar) suddenly accosted Jesus in **Luke 10:25** with the question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” he was asking a question that would have been on the hearts of many Israelites. Long ago, through the prophets, God had promised His people that at the future Day of the LORD He would come to them to establish His Kingdom reign on earth in their midst. But they realized that the delaying of His Kingdom was because of their sin. That is why they were currently suffering under the rule of their Roman oppressors rather than experiencing the peaceful rest God had promised. There were many answers currently being given by their Jewish leaders (some respectable and others far more radical) as to what an Israelite should do to hasten the coming Day of the LORD and to prepare to enter His Kingdom when He comes, or to inherit eternal life.

That was one of the purposes of John the Baptist coming to the people to prepare them for the coming of the LORD (**see Luke 3:2-6, 10, 14**). To get the full import of what Luke is telling us in this passage we really need to go back and survey **the prophecy of Isaiah**, especially **chaps. 40-55** (written over 700 years before the birth of Jesus), where Isaiah stresses the promise that the LORD God, Yahweh, who has measured the waters of the earth in the hollow of His hand and has weighed the mountains in His scales is coming to renew Israel’s strength, so that upon His strength and power, they will mount up with wings like eagles and run and not be weary and walk and not faint (**cf. Isaiah 40:12, 31**).

We should also take a look at the ending of **Malachi’s prophecy** (written around 500 years before the birth of Jesus) where again the LORD God promised that His messenger would come to prepare the way for the coming of Yahweh who will suddenly appear in His temple like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’ soap to cleanse His people from their sins (**Mal. 3:1-5**).

John was sent by God as the Day of the LORD approached to teach Israel what they should do in preparation of the coming Kingdom of God so that they will be forgiven of their sins and able to inherit eternal life. It is vital to understanding who Jesus was and is that He is the One who suddenly appears before John at the beginning of His ministry to submit to the baptism of John upon whom the Holy Spirit descends and the heavens are ripped open with the declaration of His Father, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased” (**Luke 3:21-22**). John was sent by God to prepare Israel for the coming of the LORD God, Yahweh to His people, bringing His Kingdom on earth as it was in heaven, and His name in Jesus.

Now, while the lawyer may not be sincerely asking Jesus the question about eternal life – in fact, we are told that He approaches Jesus to put Him to the test (Luke 10:25) - he certainly is asking

what would have been an extremely important question floating around throughout Israel's communities.

The answer Jesus points the lawyer to, was not only the culminating answer of years of scholarship of pouring over the details of the law, but was at the heart of every Israelites' daily confession before God in the Shema:

Deuteronomy 6:4-6 ⁴ ¶ "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.

This commandment perfectly summarizes the first half of the ten commandments and the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself (**from Lev. 19:18**) summarized the latter half of the ten commandments. Jesus provided a beautiful and powerful illustration of the horizontal, human-to-human dimension of God's commandment to love in the parable of the good Samaritan (**Luke 10:29-37**). Jesus left the lawyer to think deeply about this radical example of neighbor-love, which, as we saw last time, exemplifies the kind of love that Jesus loved you and me with and commands us:

John 13:34-35 ³⁴ "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

But now, the Holy Spirit of God invites us to consider an even more powerful example of what the greatest commandment looks like, to love the LORD your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind (**Luke 10:38-42**). This is perhaps one of the most practical, beneficial lessons in all of the Gospels of what is at the heart of being a true disciple of Jesus. If you, as a follower of Jesus Christ, want to know what it LOOKS like to love your God with the totality of your whole being, then you have here is this precious story a snapshot of Mary's singular devotion to the Word of God coming from the lips of Jesus (**v. 39**) – the one thing that is necessary (**v. 42**).

Before we begin to look at this story in more detail, it needs to be pointed out that throughout church history there has often been unhealthy extremes in the life of the church between the practical and the contemplative lives of the Christian believer. Some have completely withdrawn from the world around them into a monastic life of contemplation where they serve no one but themselves and their own personal spirituality or piety before God, divorced from any true love for their neighbor. But Jesus asks His Father not to take us out of the world but to protect us from the evil one in the world while He sends us into the world, armed with His word to make Him and His Kingdom known to others (**cf. John 17:15-18**). That is why Jesus gave us the

illustration of the parable of the good Samaritan and calls us to go into the world and love as He loved us. The Christian life is a very practical life. Paul tells us that we are certainly saved by grace through faith, which does not originate in us, rather our salvation is a gift of God. But then he goes on to remind us that one of the reasons why we are saved, recreated in Christ Jesus, is for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (cf. **Eph. 2:8-10**).

On the other side of the extremes are those who see the Christian life as only doing good to others and very little about studying the Word of our LORD God, or what we can call the contemplative life. Years ago, I had a teacher in Seminary put two verses together for me that revolutionized the way I thought about the Christian life. Those two verses are: **Luke 19:10** and **John 4:23**.

Luke 19:10 ¹⁰ "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

As a Southern Baptist I practically cut my teeth on this verse. I grew up not only memorizing this verse, hearing a multitude of sermons on it, but the whole of the Christian life was in many ways reduced to practically living this idea to the fullest. Everything in the Christian life became missions and evangelism, which are very important to making God's Kingdom known to the world. After all, we wouldn't be Christians today had God not sent the Church to witness to us.

But then this professor connected this verse with **John 4:23** in a way that I had never seen before and the way I thought of the Christian walk as a follower of Jesus Christ forever changed. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, but why?

John 4:23 ²³ "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

Jesus, who is the eternal God of Israel, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, who from Him and through Him and to Him are all things has been sent by His Father to seek you out from among the thorns and thistles of this world, His wheat among the tares, to save you. But why? Why has He chosen to give you eternal life? To make you His worshippers!

That is why He has lovingly sought you out. This is what our catechism means when it proclaims the chief end of man is to "glorify God and ENJOY Him forever!" To worship our God is how we ultimately glorify Him – it is how we enjoy Him forever.

Think about how we use most things in life. Almost everything in our lives is used for a purpose greater than itself. Sometimes we confuse these and we fall into all sorts of emotional problems. We can think of a "means to an end" as an end in itself and become obsessed with what is not the proper goal of our lives. Think for a moment how this can happen. A man might see his job as an end in itself. He wraps his whole life up into that job. He puts all his eggs in one basket as it

were. Everything in life becomes how well he performs in his career. When things are going well, you will find him in the best of moods. When he begins to struggle at work, you want to stay as far away from him as possible. You don't even want to begin to think what he will be like when he finally has to retire from his work! All his life, he has put all his energy into his job. He has neglected his family for years sounding honorable that after all he was keeping food on the table. That's what Harry Chapin's, *Cat's in the Cradle*, was getting at. What's happened? The man has made his job the most important thing in life. It's become the first thing in his life, his chief end. But he wasn't made by God to find his chief end in his career. That was a means to a far greater end. He was made to find his chief end only in Jesus Christ and to enjoy Him forever. His job was only one small sliver of something much larger than himself or ever his life here on earth. He was made for something eternal, cosmic, permanent – to know God and to love Him with his whole being.

As Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem, preaching the Kingdom of God in all the cities He is entering, we are told in v. 38 that as He enters the village, we later come to know is Bethany (about 2 miles east of Jerusalem on the south-eastern slope of the Mount of Olives) where He is welcomed by a woman named Martha and her sister, Mary (vv. 38-39; cf. John 11:1ff; 12:1ff.). In what happens next, we see, in contrast to the way the lawyer "tested" Jesus (10:25), how Jesus should be properly received. Both Martha and Mary received Jesus into their home in contrast to the Samaritans who did not receive Jesus in 9:52-53 or the villages where the 70 entered and Jesus told them to wipe the dust off their feet and declare that the Kingdom of God has come near to them but they did not receive it (10:10-12).

But within the home itself there is clearly another division in how Jesus is to be received. First, we find Mary at Jesus' feet eager to hear the Word of God (v. 39). God has visited Martha and Mary's house and Mary has stopped everything else in her life to listen to her Master, her King, the LORD her God. She is completely and singularly devoted to her LORD, loving Him with all her heart, all her soul, all her strength and with all her mind (cf. 10:27).

But her sister's attention is elsewhere (v. 40). Luke tells us that she was distracted with all her preparations, or domestic duties. We don't know if Jesus is alone or if a crowd of His disciples entered into Martha and Mary's home. But the picture here is that Martha is busy either trying to get all the food on the table or she is busy trying to get everything cleaned up after the meal. From Martha's perspective she is going through a lot of trouble for her welcomed, honored guests (v. 40) and there is certainly nothing wrong with "normally" attending to these necessary affairs in life. But this is no "normal" moment in their home! The Kingdom of God has entered their doors and salvation has come to their house today.

But Martha can't see how special this moment is. Normally, her request for her sister's help would not only make sense but the fact that Mary would refuse to help would be a mark of neglect and rudeness for her sister. Martha, for all her best intentions has become entangled in "worries and riches and pleasures of this life" (cf. 8:14) and has lost sight of the preeminence of the One who is sitting in her living room. If only Martha knew at this moment what Paul will go on later to explain that this One is:

Colossians 1:15-20 ¹⁵ ¶ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Notice how sharply Martha rebukes Jesus (v. 40). You begin to wonder if Martha has already grown too accustomed to Jesus' presence. Martha is trapped by her work. It no longer brings her peace and joy because it has become an end in itself – it is her idol. She has made a secondary thing a first thing and now she not only has missed the joy of the first thing, she no longer has joy in the secondary thing. She has become concerned with "what shall we eat and what shall we drink" (12:29) when the one thing that is necessary is to first seek His Kingdom and His righteousness knowing that all these things will be added to you (cf. Matt. 6:33; Luke 11:31).

There is similar moment in the book of Acts when good of the widows is threatening to distract the elders from the preaching of the Word and an entire office is created in the church to meet those needs lest the elders singular devotion to prayer and the ministry of the word be neglected (Acts 6:1-4). Many will say they don't have time to meditate on the Word of God for all the things they have to do but Jesus says you don't have time not to meditate on the Word of God. That is the one necessary thing you shouldn't neglect. There is no question that food has to be prepared but even what we often think of as most necessary is not the ONE thing that is necessary – to hear the Word of God. Jesus tells Martha that Mary has chosen the "good portion" and He will not take it away from her.

Psalms 73:25-28 ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven *but You?* And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷ For, behold, those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You. ²⁸ But as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Your works. **Amen! –SDG–**