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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Sermon preached by Mr. J.K. Popham

at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, on

Friday evening, 19/11/20.

Luke 10. v 38-42.

"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. And 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? 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."

Martha was loved by Him with Mary her sister and Lazarus their brother. A beautiful and interesting family, with the eye of God upon it. If the Lord would come to our families and let us know that He loved them, as He loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus, it would be a favour. What is to be compared with the love of Christ to people, to poor guilty, hell deserving sinners?

Jesus had come to pay them a visit, and Martha, wishing to entertain Him suitably, became very busy. Her mind and her hands were occupied in her effort to entertain her Lord and Master. In some measure she was. How far short her efforts to entertain Him must be. She could not, nobody could, entertain Christ as His worth is; but He does regard as suitable and acceptable, whatever the heart, where faith is, would dictate. Only there are so many mistakes made; Martha made a great mistake. Her activity swallowed her up, and worship for the time, was put aside, and her sister, Mary's attitude, appears to have provoked Martha, and so she goes to Christ about the matter, and asks Him, not to correct herself, but to correct Mary. You may suspect things, and not yourself, you may suspect things and think you are right, Martha did. She was right apparently, to her own view, her own feeling, but now, when she comes to Christ, He undertakes to teach her. "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things." Thou art anxious to entertain Me. He approved of her hearts desire and design, but the execution thereof swallowed her up too much. Then says He, "But one thing is needful.

These about which thou art so engaged and engrossed, these, they are only passing things. One thing on which thine eye is not just now fixed, only that is needful, and Mary whom you would have Me correct and divert from her present occupation, is in her right place, and she has chosen that good part, and so far from bidding her leave her present occupation, I confirm her in it. That good part which she has chosen, shall not be taken away from her. She was occupied as best indeed we know, in the best occupation that can be. We, some of us, have been occupied sometimes as she was. O, what an occupation it is, to be sitting at the feet of Christ, to be listening to His gracious words, to be worshipping Him, for who can doubt that she worshipped Him? She sat at His feet. She was a disciple. He was her Master, her Teacher. She sat at His feet. O what a privilege! My friends, there is no occupation to be compared with this for blessedness and for profit. I wish I could live at His feet. I wish you could. May the Holy Ghost bring us there, much more than we have ever been there.

Now there are several points to which I would like, if the Lord would help me, to draw your attention to this evening; the first, is the one thing that is needful, what is it? The second is, in what respects is it a good part? She had chosen that good part, that is to say, that one part, that one necessary thing. The third point is the choice that Mary made of that one thing needful. And the last point, is the Lord's merciful and kind confirmation of Mary in her choice.

First, what is the one thing needful? We sing it sometimes-

"Jesus is the one thing needful,
I without Him perish must."

I hope that God has written that with His own finger in living words in the hearts of a goodly number of us. It is a great lesson, and a great mercy it is to be taught it, that there is nothing here, nothing in the whole of the material world; there is nothing that the intellect of man can reach in the natural world, in the heavens and in the earth that can do him everlasting good. It is a lesson that we all dislike

to learn, because it brings us away from the world. The more deeply the Holy Ghost impresses this truth upon us, the more will the glitter of this world, and the vanity of this life and the emptiness of all things below be before us; and, therefore, in the measure of the teaching, will be our separation from the world.

Christ is needful for life: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Nothing can be a substitute for life. No galvanism acting upon the corpse to evoke some movement can give that corpse life. Nothing can be a substitute for Eternal Life, that God has given to His children in the Lord Jesus. "When Christ, who is our life shall appear." "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." "This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." "O, without this we must be in hell, in an eternal death, which is condemnation and punishment and suffering. No profession can be this life, though a profession will always, where circumstances permit it, attend it; yet it is without profession, it is independent of profession. Profession, when real, is dependent on it. No name will do. There was a church in Asia that had a name that it lived, but the testimony of Christ was, that it was dead; and very solemn it was, a dead church. No knowledge will do; "knowledge puffeth up." says the Apostle. It is a searching fact and every saint as exercised by the Spirit, will believe it, and come to look narrowly into the matter. Have I life? Am I born of God, born again, born of the Spirit? Does my religion take its spring and rise from that heavenly birth, that wonderful operation of the Eternal Spirit? Jesus is the one thing needful then, in respect of life. Living souls are in the church of God. Living souls are in heaven. Dead souls are not in the church, mystically and invisibly, and they will never be in heaven. One thing needful; business often is a hindrance to a child of God, in his experience, but life will burn its way through things, and come to the front sooner or later; but this then is the one thing.

Righteousness is the one thing needful. You cannot live if you are not righteous, that is if you are not justified. "This is the name wherewith she shall be called the Lord our Righteousness."

Forgiveness is a life, one thing needful. We are to

know that the Son of man, hath power on earth to forgive sins. It is a great thing this, to be dealt with by the Lord. O, but the objections rise very thick and fast in our legal hearts against a free forgiveness, and although God has taken pains with some of us for many years now, yet we still have (if one may venture to speak for others present) we still have that legal spirit that would make us say, 'If we were only sincere, if we could but repent, if we had but more simplicity and honesty, if we could only shed a tear, then we might go to Christ.' O, to go with all our death and hardness of heart, and innumerable wanderings and misjudging and suspicions and unkind thoughts and enmity and barrenness, O this is too much, but this is how it must be. This is how it must be.

He must be all or nothing. He will be all or nothing. He will never barter with you my friends. He will never take your penny for His grace. He will never accept your tears for His pardon. You must be a poor lost person, with all that that word 'lost' means, and then the one thing needful and needed by you and sought by you, you will find come, that is, forgiveness.

A refuge is needful. Jesus is that refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. A storm of wrath is coming and God's people see it coming and they need a refuge.

Saving and delivering and converting power is needful. Life, the life of God's people, after they are born again, seems to be one continual conversion. Ever are they being turned. They turn in the wrong direction, and the Holy Ghost turns them round into the right path, the path of life, which is above to the wise, and this must be by the power of Christ. We must be raised by His power or lie in the dust. There is an appointed day for Christ's coming, the first coming and all subsequent comings. There is an hour when He will come to a sinner, when He will look and speak and touch and smile again. His power is needful.

He is needful in His Person as a Substitute, as a Representative, as a High Priest, as the God of all grace, as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus is the one thing needful. Not house nor gold nor land, nor name, nor ease, nor profession, but the one thing is the blessed God of all grace, the Father's electing love, the Son's redeeming work, the Spirit's effectual grace, this is needful and this alone, and I hope

the Lord has written it upon many of our hearts in such a manner, as that the writing shall never be obliterated, neither here nor through Eternity. I believe some of us can now, in sincerity, as far as we know our hearts, look to God and say that we do believe that He is necessary to us, and that none else can be to us, what He can, and what we desire Him to be.

"Martha, Martha." Perhaps she is here now. It is a great mercy that Christ can roll Martha and Mary into one person. A great blessing, that sometimes He comes and casts out the spirit of Martha, and fills with the spirit of Mary. It never makes a person negligent of his duty, never, but it does very sweetly enable a person to attend to his duty in a proper manner, as the Apostle Paul speaks-"Whatsoever we do, whether ye eat or whether ye drink, do all to the glory of God." That is a great thing. Well, poor Martha, the truth is this; Jesus loved Martha, and He corrected the mistake that she was then making; and if Martha is here, may she not be cast down over much because she is Martha, but may the Lord Jesus come and correct her and tell her what is needful: Himself and Himself alone, that she may attend unto the things of Christ, and all will turn out well.

But one thing eternal life, union with Christ, justification, sanctification, wisdom, redemption, holiness, strength, strength to endure hardness, grace to know and grace to rejoice in Christ, faith to fix in His Person, to plead His death, to look to His merit, to hang on His Priestly character and office, this, this, is the one thing needful. Bless God for this lesson and bless the Holy Spirit if He has taught us it in measure.

Secondly, in what sense shall we take this word, or how look at it? "Mary hath chosen that good part. How shall we speak of it as being good? Look at the reverse, at the contrary, look at this world: you can say of no single thing in it, of no blessing that you possess to-day that it is abiding; it is not everlasting, but Christ is everlasting. This is the goodness of that one thing needful. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but says the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews, when exhorting them to esteem highly the ministers who ministered the Word of Life to them, "Considering the end of their conversation;" that is, consider what they aim at and what they bring to you, what they preach and what you receive. The

end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and to-day and for ever; that is the portion, that is the lot and the inheritance of the Lord's people, the one thing needful. O, what a thing, an everlasting portion! Said Jeremiah, that afflicted prophet, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in Him." He was surrounded by troubles. Ungracious men afflicted him. He was troubled on every side, and he saw the judgements of God coming on his own nation. Yet his faith went out beyond them all and enabled him to say, "The Lord is my portion saith my soul." And when he was in great sorrow, being shut up in the low dungeon, then the one thing needful, the good part, came to him, "In the day when I cried unto Thee, Thou heardest me, Thou drewest near, Thou saidst, 'Fear not'."

My friends, when the world leaves you, Christ will come. When trouble oppresses you, Christ will come. When emptiness troubles you, He will appear. When you have nothing here, that will give you rest, or yield you satisfaction, on which you can look and say, "Now I shall have this tomorrow most certainly," then He will come. O, what a portion He is, the one thing needful and a good thing too, that good part, that everlasting part, endless.

It is a good part in that it is spiritual and therefore satisfying to the soul. Temporal things we need, according to God's dispensation, but we only need them for the hour and they cannot satisfy our souls; but O what satisfaction there is in Christ, when He visits a sinner, and the sinner looks on Him, and hears Him speak; when sin flies at His approach, when lust dies in His light even as the adulterer and murderer hates the dawn of the morning, then He is seen to be precious and He satisfies the soul. There is satisfaction in Jesus Christ, satisfaction for the understanding; not that you understand Him fully, but the little you know of Him satisfies your understanding. He satisfies the heart; the affections find in Him a centre, an end. He satisfies the will, yes, the will of the Lord becomes then the will of the sinner and His will runs out in unison with God's will in providence as well as in grace. O, to see that he is chosen to obtain salvation; O, to believe, and perceive, that Christ comes, by occasions to the poor and the needy and the crying and the distressed one. This is the most blessed satisfaction that he can possibly wish to have. It is good because it overcomes death, hell and sin; death, hell and sin in our nature.

A hell of sin, an awful death, in our nature and about us. We deserve also that terrible hell that the wicked shall be driven into, but the Lord does not let these our enemies prevail altogether. Sometimes you may complain of a very dead heart, a very cold heart; no means of grace, no reading in the scripture can touch you as it seems. O, but when it is so and the Holy Ghost draws near to you and gives you grace to draw near to the throne of grace, there to confess your sins and there to bemoan your condition and grieve over your frequent departures and seek mercy; for Christ to come and show mercy, then you will find that there is a conquering power at work, an overcoming influence operating on your spirit. The Lord is there in some measure, and sin goes out, is driven out, cast down and like Dagon loses legs and hands and head. What a mercy it is that grace overcomes, that the sin we often fear will overcome us is beaten down and we, often beaten from the throne of grace, get now a change and Christ beats down our enemies and again life moves and grace conquers and faith goes out to Him. It is a good part that is almighty and our Lord is infinite, omnipotent; and no devil, no indwelling sin, no darling lust, no master sin shall ever conquer. Christ gives the victory. He obtained it on the cross. He gives it in the conscience, in the affections, in the will. It is a good part.

It is a good part because it is so surpassingly sweet and welcome. This is wonderful, that notwithstanding all the opposition to Christ that we offer, all the resistance of a sin-loving nature, He comes over all and does it in such a way as to secure the sinner's loyalty and fill the sinner with peace and sweetness. O, have you not known this, how, when you have thought He would beat you and chastise you and you have feared it and justified Him in anything He might do, that then He has shown mercy? This is one of His most winning ways, one of His most tender dealings with His children. O, it is a winning way He has. He gathers the soul to Himself and instead of the sharp reproof and the smart dealing that we have expected, and thought must come to us He has forgiven us. Just as you have it in Isaiah, "I hid me, I smote him and he went on in the frowardness of his heart." and then what will the Lord do with such a wretch? He is joined to his idols, he is bent to backsliding, he says he will go after his lovers. What will the Lord do with such a person? Will He tell us? He says, "I will heal him. I will restore comforts unto him and to His mourners." We must understand a little of this,

Some of us do. O the conquering love of Christ.- "After that I was smitten, I was turned, I smote upon my thigh." When? When He said, "Is Ephraim my dear son? How shall I set thee," whom I love." as Zeboim? How shall I make thee as Admah?" (Jer.31.20. Hosea 11.8.) O, He wins his children by kissing them. We have thought perhaps His rod was terrible and have not had grace to submit to it, but His kiss is heaven, His forgiveness is bliss. There is a sweetness, O, such a sweetness, in that good part; it is a good part and it is a good part because it is so full. The river of God is full of water, a river of pleasures at His right-hand. Think of it, poor sinner, you have short commons now perhaps, a drop now and again, a crumb here, a little ray there, but very short for the most part. God is wise and God is just in His dealings with His children and if they get more hunger than bread, it is wise; but there is a fulness and they shall know it. They know it now by faith; they shall know it by experience. Christ, while here, had much darkness, much suffering. Then His Father showed Him the path of life and pleasures at His right-hand for evermore. His poor followers often get their folly chastised and get darkness and feel the bitterness of sin and the bitterness of sinning against the Lord and of walking in things which do not profit them. Then there are times when He changes His manner, not His heart, not His purpose, but His manner and He calls a poor backslider His own. He looks upon those who have been constantly seeking commerce with wrong things and says- "O virgin of Israel." He lets out a little of His mercy, sweet mercy, tender mercy, and gets the whole soul's affections and trust and confidence. He has great blessings, infinite mercies, plenteous redemption, fulness of all things and He lets us see this fulness sometimes, and sometimes lets a little of it out and we get it; "That Thou givest them they gather." Perhaps you mis-judge Him, perhaps you have suspicions of Him, because of His strange dealings with you; but if you have grace in exercise to wait on Him and ply the throne of grace with your request and ask Him to remember His holy promise, you won't find all the severity you expect and fear. He will turn with double love. The prodigal got a good time when he came back. Hart expresses it well:

"What treatment since he came?

Love tenderly expressed.

What robe is brought to hide his shame?

The best, the very best."

O, a free gospel, a full gospel, a glorious gospel, a loving Christ, a tender hearted Saviour, ever ready to fly to the help of the poor and the needy when he crieth, and him also that hath no helper, this is the good part. It is ever full my friends, Come to this fountain.

I must not dwell all the time on this point, though it is so inviting. Look at Mary's choice in the next place, look at her choice. Now I think I can put it, by the help of the Lord, in two or three words, and I will speak of three faculties of the soul which unite in making this choice. First, understanding: The Apostle desires that the Lord would bring the Colossians to a "full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The psalmist says, "Give me understanding and I shall live," and the Spirit of wisdom and understanding and of revelation in Jesus Christ comes and opens the mystery of Christ, of His Person so glorious, His work so sufficient, His love so infinite, His fulness so eternal, exhaustless, His offices, His Names, as they are opened a little to the understanding appear to it to be the most excellent, most wonderful and mysterious, yet most blessed of all things that have ever been presented to it. All the mysteries of creation and of providence sink beside this, nothing like this to the understanding, and I appeal to you who have been taught and have had the Holy Ghost for your teacher, and have been favoured to look a little into the mystery of Christ, whether or not you have ever seen an object and had any understanding in any object, that could be compared with Him Who was shown to you by the Holy Spirit? Men speak of their intellect, their intellectual power and the acuteness of their intellectual perception, but I will venture to say this, that the intellect of the Lord's children gets discovered to it, what no mere intellect, in any man or angel, could ever discover, and that brings such a sense of solidity, and such a sense, of there being in Christ everything that the human mind can wish for, to rest on, and to ruminate upon, that the understanding falls into love with it. You understand me, doubtless, some of you.

Then take the affections; as these follow the understanding, and they do in this way, they do seek to embrace Jesus Christ. O, what feelings some of us have had sometimes about Christ.

Warm, tender love has gone out to Him, and if at that moment or in those moments, Christ had appealed to us as He appealed to Peter, "Lovest thou Me?" We could not have hesitated, even as Peter was not able to hesitate, "Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." Yes, my brethren, the affections do go to Christ. They see Him in His beauty.

Then the third faculty is the will, and when the understanding approves and the affections are fixed on an object, then the will will go along with them. I know it is so and you know it too. You know it in your measure. I know it in my small measure. Now you take these three faculties that we all possess; touched, instructed, enlightened, drawn by the Holy Ghost, and by that great attraction that is in the one thing needful. You say, "Now I understand what it is to make a deliberate choice." You are not driven by the lash to this. You are not hurried by any carnal feeling, but you are brought in the most deliberate way to look to, cast yourself upon, and seek to possess for your inheritance, the Lord Jesus. I appeal to you, my brethren, have not you made this choice, have you not, more than once, in your life, in secret made this blessed choice and felt, now if the Lord would only indulge you with one thing, you would be satisfied, and that one thing was to sit at His feet, not let you roam again but enchain your heart, your will, your understanding and keep you there, looking on, admiring, adoring, loving, choosing Christ. Away goes freewill. Away goes creature power. Here is a favoured sinner. He says, "I can do nothing else. My heart has gone. He has got it." He has made that choice and the Lord has confirmed Mary here, and He confirms all his children in the same way. No hell, no devil, no law, no world, no indwelling sin shall ever prevail so as to rob the soul of Him that has been chosen. You are saved against your choice, you are saved in your choice, nature is against this. Faith approves it well.

"Which shall not be taken away from her." Sometimes the confirmation is in the sealing of the Spirit. Sometimes it is in a new visit of Christ. Sometimes it is in some sweet renewing of the mind by the Holy Ghost. Sometimes it is in an hour of affliction. When you think that the Lord is dealing hardly with you, when you are afraid you will lose things, He comes again and you again embrace Him and again are willing to do nothing but sit at His feet, receive of His words and learn of Him. "It shall not be taken away from her."

May the Lord bless His Word.