

1397-107
LaP 812Sermon preached by Mr. J. K. Popham
on Sunday evening, 27th. August 1933

Text: Luke 10 v. 41 & 42

"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."

* * * * *

Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus and He must needs pay them a visit. "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." Then comes the instruction of Christ. "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things." Is Martha here? The word "careful", means inward distraction; "troubled", means bustling, anxious moving about; and these two things, so hurried Martha hither and thither, that she had no time to listen to the teaching of the divine Lord and Master who had condescended to come into her house. I say, is Martha here? Perhaps she is. One would think certainly she is. "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" 'How am I to manage? What provision am I to make? How can I make two ends meet? The supply is short and I do not know what to do.' Inwardly she is distracted, and bustles about. Wandering, wandering, moving, trying to make things straight, in entertaining the Lord, but she went the wrong way. It is a great mercy to believe that our times are in the hands of God; to be enabled to commit our way, to feel in our souls, more concerned about His smile, His teaching, than about any other thing. "Take --- no thought," said the Lord, "Take --- no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for --- itself." - 'Take no thought, what you shall eat, what you shall drink and wherewithal you shall be clothed,' - taking in, in such words, the whole of our life. Taking in the circumstances of our life, and also the unbelief of our hearts; the unbelief of our hearts that sets more by

temporal things, than spiritual. We are a poor congregation, and every true believer will acknowledge that he is a poor believer. That today's things get hold of him and how to get through, he does not know, for the business of today is perplexing, and how to get through it he does not know; that the perplexities of the family and the providence of God, do perplex and harass the mind. Think of these two words, and probably you know both of them. You are careful, distracted, distraught. How the table shall be furnished, that the Lord's presence shall be honoured, and you say, 'How am I to honour God in these circumstances?' You may often, some of you. I know one, who has often said that the honour of God on the lip has not been first in the heart. "This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me," - and so you may feel it, - so you may be a Martha. Martha's house may be very comfortable, but a barn with Christ, is a privilege and the mercy of sitting at His feet is far better, and the soul blessed with grace knows it, feels it. "Every one," it is written, "shall receive of Thy words." They shall sit at His feet. "Yea, He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand: they sat down at Thy feet," - the feet of the Saviour, and received His words. Many things, - husband, wife, business, domestic matters, - many things. Who present, does not know what the 'many things' mean? We are believers, but even natural religion will teach a person at times, that he is very foolish to be so unduly concerned, so inly distracted, and outwardly bustling about. Who was sufficient for Adam unfallen? God, - God was sufficient! Of whom did Paul preach to the Athenians, telling them that they were too superstitious? Paul said of God, "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." But that natural religion is not enough, it will never save a man from being distracted with care. Rising up early, sitting up late and eating the bread of sorrows, - it will never save any of you from that. Ah, some, when they get that look back and see how foolish, how wicked, they have been in caring for the things of this life, and taking little or no heed to the things of eternity, - to their own soul's interest, - but we must die, my friends, yea, and while we live, God may make some know, even of His people, that though He may have given riches, He may not have given an appetite to enjoy them. He has many ways, even in the world, of proving to men the insufficiency of the world in regard to its things. Yes, if we could believe Christ it would be well for us.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Oh poor distracted Marthas, look at this gracious word - "Careful". . . God only, knows and yourselves what the distraction is. 'What shall I do, whither shall I go?' And the mind is full of that poor unbelieving distraction. But the bustling about the world . . . You must catch a train, and bustle, you must attend to this correspondence, and bustle in your mind, and forget God. You kneel down, and you remember you have not written such a letter, and you are distracted and cannot pray, and you go to do the work. All kinds of things come into this word, - many things, many. Ah, but God sometimes deals with His people. He says: 'Martha, Martha, this is not right. This wont nourish your soul; this will do you no good; this wont increase anything here below. You cannot fill your barns with this; you cannot fill your wine presses with this; you are anxious, distracted and bustling. You sow much, God causes you to reap little; you go to your wine fat for fifty measures and draw twenty; you look at your bag with your wages in it and you see God has put holes in it. Martha, Martha, eternity is near, and these "many things" will be of no avail when you come to die; whatever we possess we must leave behind us.' I leave the consideration of this word with you.

Look next at Christ's important word: "But one thing is needful." The Psalmist had that on his mind - in his soul, - when he said, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple." If you have ever had a glimpse of that beauty, you will want to be gazing on it all your days. The beauty of Christ. "But one thing is needful," and that may be summed up in the Apostle Paul's words. He says that in Christ, there is neither male nor female, neither rich nor poor, neither bond nor free. Why?. . . All are one, and Christ is all and in all. That is the sum and substance of this important matter - "one thing," and by the help of the Lord I will speak of this one thing first of all, with respect to His Dearly Beloved Son whom He sent.

Speaking of His Father and the Holy Spirit, by Isaiah, Christ said, "And now the Lord God, and His Spirit, hath sent Me." What a mission the dear Redeemer was sent on. What a work He came to do,

and there was given to Him grace for His church before the world began, as we read in Timothy: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." This is the one thing needful, for in the Person of Christ is the Eternal Son of God. There is also the sacred, spotless human nature, which He assumed and took up, - impeccable. To sin, was impossible with Christ. He did no sin. Now since God can approve of nothing but what is perfect, Christ being absolutely perfect is the one thing needful. Do not look for growth in grace to make you more acceptable to God. Do not crave the best things that the Spirit can give you to make you more complete in Christ than you are. Do not think that a long profession of truth and being kept in that profession with some measure of consistency will add to your acceptance. As at the beginning, so to the end. How did you receive Christ? How did you receive Him? Paul tells the Thessolonians how they received Him. "Our gospel," he says, "came not unto you in word only, but also in power." - "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, --- even Jesus." And, as you received Him, - being sinners, to save you from sin; being guilty, to justify you by His precious blood and righteousness; weak, that you may be strengthened by Him; foolish, that you may be taught by Him, sitting at His feet. "So," says the Spirit by Paul, "walk ye in Him:" - "rooted and grounded in love."

"But one thing is needful." What is needed to make us perfect - complete in Christ? First, His obedience. His obedience stretched from the womb to the cross. His obedience embraced the whole law. The law was in His heart. He came to fulfil it, and did fulfil it, and part of the fulfilment of it, was that He, being made sin, should be made a curse. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." That brings to pass the completeness of the church of God in Christ and brings this forward: "But one thing is needful." Only one! A Christian is a man of one thought, one aim, one desire, as he is under the grace of the Spirit. "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death," and Paul was not satisfied with what he knew. He knew much more than any other person in the world, probably, at that time, and since, but he was not

satisfied with all that he knew of God, and therefore he said, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." He saw, he felt, he knew that Christ was the One needful; as, when you think of death poor child of God, who is your hope, - on whom is it fixed, - that you will be received into glory? The one thing needful - the Person of Christ. Now that is a grand thing, - a grand doctrine, - and it becomes a sweet experience when a child of God has that revelation of Christ, that both Martha and Mary had. Martha got stumbled by her carefulness and bustling about, but the root was there. Mary had at the moment a larger measure of gracious attention to Christ, and desired the "one thing," - to sit at His feet and learn of Him. The best entertainment that Christ received from these two gracious sisters was given to Him by Mary. This does not mean neglect of your duties; it means a regulation of them by grace.

Next - "And Mary hath chosen that good part." 'Freewill!' says one. Yes, quite so. I do not dispute that there is such a thing as every child of God has, - to will. To will to do His pleasure. God works it. He works in you to whom He says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." And when sin works, you fear and very much sink in your spirit, and then you work your own salvation by visits to Christ's blessed throne, and asking grace of Him to make you right and to keep you right. But, this choice, . . . what is it? Choosing the one thing needful; what causes that choice, the free choice, the most deliberate choice that ever a child of God made in this world? Two things contribute to this. First, a sense of the want, and the worth of Christ. That is no fancy. The worth of Christ is known by faith; the want of Him is felt through faith in the heart. Sin felt, makes room for Him. Sin working makes a need for Him to come and save. Pollution felt, makes work for Christ, and fits the soul for the "Fountain opened --- for sin and for uncleanness." Every child of God becomes painfully, and to his shame, acquainted with the things I have named, and they make him understand the want of Christ, and the worth of Christ is a consequence of that. He says, 'If I am to attain unto a knowledge of Christ, then all will be well.' How are you going to die? 'Oh,' say some, 'we want to die in the Lord. Why, we see the want of Him, and there is no good dying except it be in Him.' That is one thing, - the want of Christ as the

Saviour, the Mediator, the Intercessor, the Righteousness, the Holiness, the Strength, the Wisdom of a sinner, - this, this is one ingredient in this choice - "Mary hath chosen that good part." And the second thing is this: that the Holy Ghost performs His promised office and work, by revealing the Lord Jesus to the needy soul. He is promised, - it is said by Christ of Him, "He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." A flash sometimes, just a flash of heavenly light, darts into your soul and understanding, and you see the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwelling in Him. Ah, a sight never to be forgotten. Sovereign grace is seen here. The consistency of all the doctrines of grace seen in Jesus, as the Spirit reveals Him; and all the freewill, and creature power, and creature doings fly, when Christ is revealed by the Holy Ghost. But I cannot describe this Person. No. He is beyond all description. When the church did her utmost, as you read in Canticles, to describe Him, she seemed to say, 'I cannot go any further,' - He "is my Beloved," - "He is altogether lovely." Lovely in His divinity; lovely in His humanity; lovely in His Person as the God-man; and O, lovely in His approach to sinners and His invitation to come near to Him. As Joseph said to his brethren who were guilty and frightened at his presence when they knew who he was, he said, "Come near to me," and he kissed them. Yes, he kissed them, and when you get a sight of Christ, by the revealing of the Spirit, you will understand that, that Jesus in His love and pity and goodness says, 'Come near to Me,' and He kisses you. "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth: He is altogether lovely." One thing needful. Can you need more than God? Can you need more than His precious blood? Can you need more than His justifying righteousness? 'Ah,' you say, 'I want good feelings.' God can give you them. May He do it. You want assurance; may He grant it to you. He can do it. Yes, He can do it, but you will find this: what He gives you wont add to Christ, it comes from Him. Many years ago when I was deeply concerned about the sin of my nature, I was not far from the chapel on the hill, when that Scripture fell into my soul: "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost," and I said, 'Lord, the best experience Thou canst give me would not add one iota to the salvation wrought out by Jesus Christ.' Do not think lightly of experience, I am not speaking lightly of it, I know the worth of it, I know the want of it, but let it have its right place. The gift of Christ Himself, possessing everything, that is needed. "And Mary hath chosen that good part." . . .

Now for a moment, let us pause here and ask ourselves the important question: have we been led, enabled, taught to make choice of Christ? Ah, He is precious to those who say they do not know they have an interest in Him. They say, 'Oh, the beauty of Him, it is inexpressible; Oh, the greatness of Him, the reality of His Person; the greatness of His love; the glory of His grace.' One thing needful, all wrapped up in Him. Well, dear brethren in the Lord, who have been led to make this choice and to say to the Lord: 'I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes and need and seek and desire no other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified,' this is the one thing needful, but you wont be satisfied until these desires are realised.

Lastly - "Which shall not be taken away from her." Can she keep it? No, - this promise keeps it. This word keeps it: "Which shall not be taken away from her." Here I would make two or three observations. First - the devil tries to take it away. O, the temptations; O, the horrible insinuations! I am glad I am not obliged to speak of these things that I have experienced against Christ, even when preaching to you. The devil. . . From the day that he was permitted to enter Eden and deceive Eve and bring about the ruin of human nature, - from that day to this, - he has been the especial enemy of Jesus Christ. Men may talk of the Fatherhood of God; they may talk about winning the world for Christ and all that kind of rubbish, but when you come to the point, - when the devil sees a poor sinner, blessed with Christ formed in his heart, the hope of glory, - then he goes to that poor creature. Says sometimes, 'You are deceived;' sometimes, 'You are a hypocrite;' sometimes, 'You love yourself more than Christ;' sometimes, 'You are an infidel believing nothing and not knowing what to believe;' and sometimes, he is permitted to stir up the unutterable lusts and corruptions of our hearts to such a degree, that we are ashamed and afraid to look to God. Ah, it is no trifle to be a sinner in this way, but take courage sinner, if the devil is your enemy and makes you understand that, God will be your friend, and though the devil may trample you under foot sometimes, this promise will stand good: "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Oh, what a word, yea, and when you are fearing: "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him." Righteous. . . 'Oh,' says one, 'I am not.' If you are united to Christ you are, and if you are united to Christ, you have made this beautiful choice, and Jesus will confirm it. "Which shall not be taken away from her."

Secondly - your own fallen nature will try to smother and drown this good thing in you. Nature. . . I have sometimes said, as you know, I wish I could take this, my own nature, and trample it under my feet in the pulpit. What an enemy it is, what an enemy! Kneel down, and it is ready to curse God; read the Scriptures, it tries to make you an unbeliever; every sort of device will this fallen nature of ours use, - press on us, - in order to take away what is, blessed be God, unloseable. "Shall not be taken away from her." Why? Because the Lord keeps it. He keeps it! Bernard Gilpin says somewhere, that when he had a blessing, it came into his mind that he could not keep it and he asked the Lord to keep it for him, and that is what His poor people have to do. It may slip from your memory and you may say, 'What was that word, what was that feeling, what was that experience?' And you cannot remember it for the time. O what a kindness in the Spirit of God it was, to inspire this word: Then, "they remembered His words." They had forgotten it. I could not tell you what a help that was to me once. Then "they remembered His words." It came back; it was made, as it were, to rise up as from a living spring in your heart and memory and you say: 'I remember it, I remember the feeling, the sweetness;' or, 'I remember the rebuke and reproof that I got,' but you remember the word. The Lord wont let the devil, wont let human nature, take this good thing away. The Lord Jesus keeps it, that is to say, He keeps His sheep. 'My sheep,' He says, 'are in My hand, and no man can pluck them out of My hand, - My sheep are in My Father's hand and My Father is greater than all and no man can pluck them out of My Father's hand.' (John 10, v 28 & 29). He keeps the thing, and He keeps the sinner to whom He gave it. It is all "keeping". As Peter says, "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." "Kept by the power of God," is kept in right exercise; kept in prayer; kept in believing; kept in hope; kept in renewing the spirit of the mind: "--- Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Kept. . . They are kept in the covenant, and the thing is kept in the covenant. Covenant blessings are in Christ, stored up there, and He gives them out prudently, liberally. Yes, they are kept unto salvation, and kept for the inheritance, and it is reserved in heaven for them. An inheritance prepared and kept for them, and they, poor creatures, kept for the inheritance; a mutual keeping; a mutual blessing. What about the hour of death? Death may come, and

disable you from speaking, but it cannot make you poor. It cannot take away what Christ has given you. Some of the best saints have been unable to speak much on their dying bed. It is, I think, Newton who says about this point: "Tell me not how a person died, but how he lived." If you live a life of faith in the Son of God, you will die in the Lord; and, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." Mary, dear Mary, sister to some of us; Abraham the father of all believers; these saints, together with all that are named in the Scriptures, thus made a good choice. You have had the world before you. I have. You have had Christ before you and there has been, as it were, put to you this: 'Which will you have?' Faith says, "Give me Christ, or else I die." Is that true? Yes, blessed be God, true of some of us, though some of us may not have attained to that full assurance of faith which is so desirable and so sweet, but to be brought into the "riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ," in whom all the fulness, all the riches, all wisdom are found, this, this is that, which is set before the saints, and the Holy Ghost helps them from time to time to seek that.

Amen.