

## **ONE THING IS NEEDFUL**

(Ken Kreider 10/14/06)

**Scripture Reading: John 17:3** *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

### **Prayer.**

There is a story in the Bible of a woman named Mary, who had a sister named Martha, and a brother named Lazarus. Many believe that this Mary is also the one called Mary Magdalene since both had the same name, both had bad reputations, both had money, neither were married, and their names are not mentioned together in the same sentence. But I'll leave that for you to decide. But Mary apparently lived a very sinful life and one day she heard a traveling preacher and was drawn to Him by words like these,

**Mt 11:28**

*“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

*“Let not your heart be troubled”*

*“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”*

*and*

**Mt 5:4**

*Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

I'm sure Mary had done her share of mourning, especially when her brother Lazarus died.

You read about her story in Luke 10:

***Luke 10:38*** *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.*

Jesus is in town! What would you do if Jesus came to your town. Would you run out to meet Him, or would you be driving 100 mph in the opposite direction, towards Las Vegas? And not only does he come to your town, but he comes to your house. Apparently Jesus often visited Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus.

Martha was probably older than her sister Mary. Martha administered the affairs of the house.

***39****And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard*

*his word.*

Mary had learned where the power was – to sit at the feet of Jesus.

*40But Martha was cumbered about much serving,*

So Martha is thrashing around in the kitchen making the potato casserole and the spinach salad. Meanwhile, Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus.

*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.*

*41And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:*

*42But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

## **LAZARUS**

Mary and Martha's brother was Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. I'm sure she was very grateful for that not to mention that Jesus forgave her many sins as we shall read later. The interesting thing to me about the story of Lazarus is that, although he had been dead for four days, when Jesus raised Him from the dead, he didn't have any stories to tell about being in the bliss of heaven or the fires of hell. And if he had been in heaven, what a cruel joke it would be for Jesus to bring him back to this gloomy planet, don't you think? No, he was completely silent on the subject. The Bible declares, *"The dead know not anything."* Ecc. 9:5 And, *"His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish"* Ps. 146:4 The Bible has much more to say about this subject, but that is not my main topic this morning.

Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus were invited to a feast at the house of Simon, who was a leper until Jesus healed him. It is interesting to note that Jesus sometimes debated with people before he healed them, but he never debated with a leper. He always healed them instantly without question. I suppose that is a testimony to the great compassion of Jesus. He is touched by the feelings of our infirmities. I think Jesus couldn't stand to see people suffering.

A hospital visitor once saw a nurse tending to a leprosy patient, who had horrible leprosy sores all over. The visitor said, “I wouldn’t do that for a million dollars!” The nurse said, “Neither would I. But I do it for Jesus for nothing.” When we fully understand what Christ has done for us, we will be willing to do anything for Him. That is genuine Christian service.

Mary is the one who, out of her great love for Jesus, began anointing Jesus feet with a very costly perfume, called spikenard, and washing His feet with her hair. *Luke 7:36* Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. *37* When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, *38* and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

## JUDAS

Now how would you feel if you are having a special dinner at your house, perhaps to honor a special guest, and someone begins to put perfume on the feet of the special guest? Would you be ashamed or would you be sympathetic to the situation? Well, Judas Iscariot, who was also at the party, was upset. He said, *5* Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

*6* This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

*7* Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.

*8* For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.

Mary did not try to answer her accuser. She was simply following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. I like the way it reads in DA560: “Inspiration stoops to give no reason. An unseen presence, it speaks to mind and soul, and moves the heart to action. It is its own justification.” Christ shared with her the meaning of the act – it was to anoint His body for burial. Judas said, “To what purpose is this waste?” Many feel that the great sacrifice of Jesus for fallen humanity was just a waste. I can see the angels of Heaven looking down at us who have refused to be uplifted by the boundless love of Christ, and thinking, “Why this great waste?” That might be justified. But Christ’s atonement was to be full and complete, and able to

reach every soul that God created. But his plan of redemption is still not a waste, because there must be enough and to spare. Christ would have died for one soul that was lost. COL 187 Several years ago, I heard a song called “For Only One”, which said, He would have suffered and died for only one, and I remember thinking, well, it’s a nice song, but I don’t think He would have come for only one soul. And then I read it one day in a book by Ellen White, and I thought, “Wow. It’s true. He would have died for only one soul.”

Isn’t it interesting how Judas looked down at Mary while he himself was sinful at heart and he knew it? It makes me wonder how often those who are critical of others have worse problems themselves.

Two people are recorded in scripture as having kissed Jesus. Judas kissed His face, and then betrayed Him. Mary kissed His feet, and then served Him. What a striking contrast and a stinging rebuke to the selfishness of Judas.

## **SIMON**

Simon had been drawn to Jesus because Jesus had healed him of his leprosy. This feast was held at the house of Simon. The story is found in all four gospels (**John chapter 12, Luke 7, Matthew 26, and Mark 14**). I suppose it was sort of a celebration of some of the great things that Jesus had done. Martha was there to do the serving. Lazarus was there. He had recently been raised from the dead and if you want to have a successful feast, of course you want to have something spectacular like that at your feast. Many people came to see Jesus. Others just came to see Lazarus up and walking about; they wanted to see one raised from the dead. Many people expected Lazarus to relate stories of his after death experiences. But as I mentioned earlier, to their surprise, he told them nothing. And Mary slips in to wash Jesus’ feet with her hair out of her great gratitude and love for Jesus.

Mary probably slipped over to Jesus to pour her perfume on Him and wash his feet while everyone else was eating and talking. Mary hoped to do this kind gesture without being noticed. But I’m sure the smell of that perfume permeated the place. And you don’t go unnoticed when you do a thing like that. She probably anticipated using this perfume to anoint Jesus’ body in his death (see DA560), but she was so filled with love and gratitude for what Jesus had done for her that she couldn’t wait. She wanted to do something nice for Jesus. So she poured it upon His living form. And it was a reassurance to Jesus of her faith and love. How often we honor the dead with extravagant displays, but isn’t it so much better to honor them while yet

living, when the person can yet hear and feel? What a blessing a word fitly spoken at that time might be.

*39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.*

*40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.*

*41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.*

*42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?*

*43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.*

*44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.*

*45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.*

*46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.*

*47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.*

*48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.*

*49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?*

*50 And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*

So you see here that Jesus knew Simon's thoughts. And rather than rebuke him openly, He told a simple parable that got straight to Simon's heart. And what a wonderful parable it is too, wouldn't you say? This parable gives everybody hope. Whether you are a great sinner, or whether you are a leper or whether you think you are almost ready for translation, Jesus can heal you, He can forgive you, and He can help you realize how just much you need Him. And if you are a great sinner, when He forgives you and you will love Him more for it. It reminds me of Paul, who used to persecute Christians, and yet he became one of His best apostles. He said, "Of sinners, I am chief." He realized how much Jesus had done for Him.

I'm sure Simon was grateful to Jesus for not openly rebuking Him. Stern denunciation would have hardened him against repentance, but Jesus tact

helped him to see the error of his ways. Mary was a pardoned sinner; Simon was an unpardoned sinner, who now saw where he stood. The proud Pharisee then became a humble and meek disciple of Christ. Jesus does not seek to expose your guilt or to condemn you. Who is he that condemns? He only wishes for you to humble yourself and repent.

## **MARY**

Jesus had cast seven demons out of Mary and she wanted to do something nice for Him in return. So we see that Mary made a special effort to honor Jesus in a special way whenever she had the opportunity, by sitting at His feet, and by washing His feet and kissing them. Jesus deserves our special attention. We can sit at His feet as Mary did. How do we sit at Jesus feet? We sit at His feet when we read His word and learn from Him. We sit at His feet by making the kingdom of God first in our interests and endeavors, and making material things subordinate to this.

One day all of us will bow at the feet of Jesus. The Bible says, Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Let's get an early start, shall we?

## **PRIORITIES**

Let's get our priorities straight, shall we? The Word is more important than the work. Does that mean that the work is not important at all? No, of course not. But the work will never flourish unless the Word is in the hearts of His people first.

If a man has a heart attack and the paramedics arrive and begin by washing his face and filing his fingernails and combing his hair instead of administering CPR, he will probably die. As Mary found, sitting at Jesus feet and hearing the Word becomes a priority for every Spirit-filled Christian.

Why are we called Christians? It's because we are followers of Christ. How do we know that we are Christians? According to a little book called Steps to Christ, this is how we know that we are genuine Christians. Of whom do we love to think? Of whom do we love to talk? Where do we place our best energy?

Paul said I am determined to know nothing else but Christ and Him crucified.

Do you find yourself thinking about Jesus?

### To “Know”

What does it mean to sit at Jesus feet? To sit at Jesus feet means to get to **know** Him. Not just to **know** about Him. But to really **know** Him – on an intimate level. Jesus said, “And this is eternal life, that they might **know** you, the only true God, and Me whom thou hast sent.”

Now here is an interesting verse:

#### [Ge 4:1](#)

*And Adam **knew** Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain*

#### [Ge 4:17](#)

*And Cain **knew** his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch*

#### [Ge 4:25](#)

*And Adam **knew** his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth*

You can see from these verses that to know someone implies a rather intimate relationship.

### Communication

How do you get to know someone? By spending time together and doing things together, and by communicating. How do we communicate? We communicate by talking to someone and by listening to them talk to us. We communicate with God by prayer and by reading His Word. That’s two-way communication. How long would your marriage last if you didn’t communicate?

### Morning Devotions

Probably the best time for getting to know Him is early in the morning. God gave the Israelites manna early in the morning, and if they waited too long, it evaporated. *Ex. 16:21* “*And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted.*”

Jesus our example practiced morning devotions. *Mk. 1:35* “*And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.*”

### Luther

Luther once said, "If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory throughout the day." Luther always combined prayer with the study of the Word.

### **Wesley**

Wesley devoted the morning hours from four to six in prayer, meditation, and study.

### **Daniel**

Daniel prayed three times a day.

### **Marriage story**

Let me give you an example of the importance of communication in a relationship. Suppose you being single somehow meet someone from California and begin a long distance relationship. Eventually you decide to get married and so one day you both meet up in Las Vegas and have a quick wedding in one of those famous little chapels over there. The preacher says, "Do you?" You both say, "I do." And the preacher says, "You are." Then after the wedding, she goes back to California and you return to St. George. A couple of years later, someone asks you, "So, are you married?" You respond, "Yep." He then says, "So where is your wife?" You say, "Well, I haven't seen her for a couple of years." He says, "But do you keep in touch by calling or writing?" You say, "Nope." He says, "Are you sure you are married?" You say, "Yep. And I have a Marriage Certificate to prove it." "Hmm. You better check on that." What was missing? A little communication perhaps? How long would you stay married if you all of a sudden stopped communicating with your spouse? Communication is probably the most important factor in a marriage. You say, "But I believe in once married, always married!" Is that how it works with God? "Once saved, always saved?" Or is it, "Once saved, always saved, as long as you stay saved?" *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. Luke 9:23*

"It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,--by abiding in Him, --that we are to grow in grace." Steps To Christ, Ch. 8

Steps To Christ reads, "Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, "Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee." This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your

plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.” Steps To Christ, Ch. 8

## TO KNOW GOD

How important is it to get to know God?

**John 17:3** *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

“When we **know** God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience.”

He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God, as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us. DA668

When we know God, we will want to do His will. His will will be our greatest desire, just as it was for Jesus.

*Jesus said, I came not to do Mine own will, but to do the will of Him that sent Me.” Jn 6:38*

*I delight to do thy will, O God. Thy law is within my heart. Ps 40:8*

## MARTHA

One thing is needful. And what is that? It is to sit at the feet of Jesus. One thing is needful – giving God first place in your life. And without that one thing, all the good works in the world cannot save a flea.

Jesus said that the only good work that can save us is to believe in Him. **Jn. 6:29** *“Jesus answered and said unto them, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”*

Suppose some stranger came up to you and handed you a check for \$1 million. You’d probably be somewhat skeptical about it, wouldn’t you? But if your millionaire **friend** gave you a check for \$1 million, you’d be very excited. What makes the difference? Knowing the person gives you faith in their promises.

Now, here is some simple logic for you.

1. We cannot obey God unless we love Him. *Jn. 14:15* "If ye love me, keep my commandments."
2. We cannot love Him unless we know Him. (Obviously)
3. We cannot know Him unless we spend regular time with Him, at His feet, learning who He really is.

Martha was cumbered with much serving. Is there anything wrong with making sure that there is food for your guests? No, that's good hospitality, don't you think? We have an example in the Old Testament of Abraham giving food to his guests. But consider who the guest was in this case. Jesus once said, "I have food to eat that ye know not of." That reminds me of when Jesus went to be baptized by John and John said, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

Martha was interested in temporal things, for all the material things of this world are temporary.

But Mary had chosen "that good part, which shall not be taken away." She was storing up treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

We don't need to worry about material things. Jesus said, *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all things needful shall be added unto you.* **Mt. 6:33** "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin. And yet I say unto you not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these." **Mt 6:29** "Are <sup>R362</sup> not two sparrows sold for a cent? <sup>F223</sup> And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. **30** "But the <sup>R363</sup> very hairs of your head are all numbered. **31** "So do not fear; you <sup>R364</sup> are more valuable than many sparrows.

*"Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." Ps.?*

With the Lord, success is not defined by how much you have, but by how much you give. With the Lord, it's not what kind of car the person drives, but what kind of person drives the car. In the world, greatness is measured by how many people work for you, but God would rather see how many people you serve.

There is a wide field for the Martha types. But let them first sit at the feet of Jesus.

## AT JESUS FEET

There is one other important application to sitting at the feet of Jesus. Here is a quote from a book called The Desire of Ages, on the life of Christ, p. 83:

“If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.”

“It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.” DA83

One of my favorite quotes reads:

“The spotless Son of God hung upon the cross, His flesh lacerated with stripes; those hands so often reached out in blessing, nailed to the wooden bars; those feet so tireless on ministries of love, spiked to the tree; that royal head pierced by the crown of thorns; those quivering lips shaped to the cry of woe. And all that He endured--the blood drops that flowed from His head, His hands, His feet, the agony that racked His frame, and the unutterable anguish that filled His soul at the hiding of His Father's face--speaks to each child of humanity, declaring, It is for thee that the Son of God consents to bear this burden of guilt; for thee He spoils the domain of death, and opens the gates of Paradise. He who stilled the angry waves and walked the foam-capped billows, who made devils tremble and disease flee, who opened blind eyes and called forth the dead to life,--offers Himself upon the cross as a sacrifice, and this from love to thee.”DA755

Mary was there by the cross when He was crucified. Mary was the first to the tomb after the resurrection. And she was the first to tell everyone that He was risen from the grave. Why did Jesus appear first to Mary? Because He came to seek and save that which was lost. If he can transform Mary, He can transform each of us. Mary loved Jesus and she sought Him. Let us do the same.

As it says in the Desire of Ages, p. 568 “Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. You may say, I am sinful, very sinful. You may be; but the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. He turns no weeping, contrite one away. He does not tell to any all that He might reveal, but He bids every trembling

soul take courage. Freely will He pardon all who come to Him for forgiveness and restoration.”

What lessons do we learn from the story of Mary?

1. We must spend quality time at Jesus feet on a daily basis in prayer and in reading His Word. Scripture records very little of what Mary said. Apparently she spent more time listening than talking. There is a reason why God gave each of us two ears but only one mouth, don't you think?
2. We must spend time at Jesus' feet beholding Him on the cross, contemplating His great sacrifice for us.
3. Mary gave from her heart when she brought the alabaster box of perfume. *“God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Cor. 9:7*
4. God loves strong people like Martha. God loves weak people. God loved Simon the leper who was also a Pharisee. God loves everybody, even you and me.

**Prayer.**

**Hymn #327 I'd Rather Have Jesus**