

# But One Thing Is Needful

by F.W. Grant

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*The one thing needful is to receive from Christ, and if we receive, all other things will be taken care of.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 37:7

**Topics:** "Sin And Consequences", "Gods Sovereignty"

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## Description

Greek Word Studies for aid\_number 35971 delves into the concept of transgression, highlighting how it goes beyond the law and involves a deliberate violation of established norms or regulations. The sermon explores the biblical instances of transgression, such as Balaam's disobedience and the consequences of wicked schemes and iniquities. It also reflects on the miraculous event of a dumb donkey speaking to rebuke a spiritually blind prophet, emphasizing God's ability to use unconventional means to convey His message and protect His people.

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## Transcript

"BUT ONE THING NEEDFUL."

A Lecture, at Plainfield, N. Y,

on Monday evening, August 4, 1884.

"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.'" (Luke 38-42.)

AS you know, beloved friends, there was genuine faith in both these women. "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." Martha had not only received the Lord into her house, but she had received Him into her heart; there is no kind of doubt about that. The very character here in which we find her was not merely her natural character. She was busy about One that she loved. She was busy about One whose glory she recognized, at least in measure. She was busy in serving Him; and there were very few, beloved friends, in that land and time, that cared to serve Him. He was One who had not where to lay His head,-

one who was despised and rejected of men - the Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; men hid, as it were, their faces from Him; He was despised, and they esteemed Him not.

Martha had faith - genuine faith, as Mary had,- faith that thought of Him truly, as at least One who had come far to serve her, One whom she owned as the Christ of God come into the world. Martha was busy in her care for such an One; and that is the solemn lesson. With all this love in her heart, and with all this real faith in His person,- that faith which made her one of the very few in Israel that recognized Him at all,- that with all that, she could be so far wrong as we see her wrong,- that with all that, she could be put in disparaging contrast with Mary her sister,- Mary who did nothing,-Mary who simply sat at His feet to hear His word. The Lord takes her up to signify His entire approbation as to where she was and what she was. He has a reproof for Martha's service, but has only approbation for Mary's simply sitting at His feet.

His words are very striking; "Thou art careful," He says to Martha;-" Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things." Beloved friends, if you are busy about many things, you will not only be busy, but troubled. Martha, we read, "was cumbered with much serving;" and she was not only "encumbered," but "troubled;" -it weighed upon her. It was very busy service; but it weighed upon her,- weighed her down. Beloved, if you have service that weighs you down, look to it-see well why it is. Plainly, that very character would put you along with Martha here. She was cumbered with much serving. She goes to the Lord with her complaint. Mary might help her; Mary has left her to serve alone. She wants Him to use His authority with Mary. She says, "Dost not Thou care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her, therefore, that she help me." She began with seeking to help the Lord, as it were, and she ends with complaining that she cannot get help herself. She wants to serve the Lord, but she turns round at last and wants to get Mary to serve her. The Lord's words are what we are to think about to-night: "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."

"But one thing is needful"- only one thing." To what a little point would that diminish all care if we realized it: only "one thing"! How many distractions would our hearts be free from it we only recognized and bowed to the truth of the Lord's words. Only "one thing"! Do you honestly think it, beloved friends? There are a great many needs in this busy world: there are a great many duties that you have, and that Christians think they have to society, to their neighbors, and what not. The Lord here would bring our hearts from every thing simply to one and that one, to sit at His feet and hear His word! Don't you feel as if that would leave service out altogether? How is it possible that only one thing is needful, and Mary had chosen that very part, when there are so many things to do? Are we to leave out service to the Lord ?- what does it mean? Beloved, this: That the thing which is to be our care is that we receive from Christ; and if we receive,-if we are receiving, beloved friends, service, and every thing else, may take care for itself. Mark, I do not mean that you won't serve. You will - you will. But I say this: that if your care is not for service, but to be receiving from Him, you will find that that "one thing" which the Lord speaks of embraces all the rest.

What God wants from us is receptiveness,- He wants in us capacity to receive. You remember what He says Himself in the seventh chapter of John, when men were busy with their feast of tabernacles before the time,- busy with their empty show of something which after all left the heart just where it was, or, rather, emptier than ever. The Lord stands up just upon that great day of the feast: the great day of the feast is when the hollowness comes out the most. And in that "great day of the feast," when men have shown how little they can do to secure the happiness they have been seeking, the Lord stands up and says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (John vii. 37, 38.)

Beloved, there is not any thing there, you see - there is not any thing about these busy Martha-cares - this busy Martha-service; there is not a bit about it - not a bit about it. "You take care," the Lord says, "to receive of Me. Come and drink; and he that believeth on Me, soul,-"he that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Well, now, can it be so simple? Have we not got a great deal more to do than believe on Christ? Why, how many of us, beloved friends, are believing on Christ? Thank God, a good many here, And how many could say - how many could realize at all that out of their bellies are flowing rivers of living water? Mark what a beautiful thing,- that out of the innermost of man's nature - the part that craves - the part that is the natural man's god in his fallen condition, the fullness flows. "Their god is their belly," says the apostle in Corinthians: that is to say, that man having fallen from God - fallen from the apprehension of a love that satisfies, and got to be a mere questioner of it, has got into self-care - into labour - into lust. God did not put him into such a place as that. God did not put him into a place where he must care; God put him into a garden; did not think that even the very world which He had created was good enough for the man of His choice, but took up one special part of it, planted it with trees of the choicest kind, made every thing that should gratify his eyes - his heart, and put him there in the midst of that garden, beloved friends; to enjoy the favour of God, and receive from His hands. And that is all.

Well, you say, was there nothing else? had he nothing to do? No; he had to refrain from doing, - he had not to take of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. There was no labour that God required of him. He was the favourite of Heaven - the last, newest creature; he was put there in a marked way as a dependent one, the most dependent, I believe, of all God's creatures. He was put there into a paradise watched by and cared for by God Himself, all his necessities made but the means of God's care for him being manifested. He was essentially a dependent creature. The angels had fallen before this, as we know, and God had made man a creature like the angels - an immortal spirit,- one who was, as it were, His child - His offspring by creation. I say, God put this spirit which He had made into a body, with which it was to be linked, and upon which it was in a certain respect to be even dependent. You know how dependent we are upon our bodies. I don't mean that Adam was in the same way that we are. He was not. I don't mean to say that there could be in Adam any tendency to death, or any thing of that sort - the condition which we are in as fallen. Surely not. But he had necessities, he had to subsist by food, he was dependent upon the senses for his communication with the world, in which he was to subsist, not independently, but maintained by food. The angels fell by pride. God, by all this, was hiding pride from man. He was teaching him dependence; caring for him, at the same time, in a way that made that dependence no trouble to him. If He made him a needy creature, He made all these things avenues by which he could be filled with satisfaction and de-light. How blessed and wonderful that! God has joined those two things together from the very beginning; making man dependent upon Himself, and making that dependence no trouble - no distress, but a means of realizing the loving care of his Maker and Preserver every day and hour.

And, beloved, you know how man fell. A beast seduced him. God would not allow him to be tempted by a higher being,- one in that character. Of course, we know it was Satan who seduced him. But God would not allow him to come in any angel-shape - as one higher than man. And that makes very significant what you find in the second of Genesis, that God made Adam look at all the beasts which He had made, and give them names. He made him give them names as having knowledge of them. And looking them through and through, Adam knew that there was not one that could be found that could be a help for him. He was the master of the beast; they were all put under his hand, and he was the lord of them. Then God made woman, and gave her to be the help for him that he needed. But, beloved, it was by a beast man fell. God would not suffer him to be tempted but by a beast. He should have no excuse. He should not be

able to say really that he was beguiled by one whom he could suppose had superior knowledge. He gave place to one who was below him, lost his superiority over the beasts themselves, and the blessed realization of what God was having vanished from him, he was sent out of paradise into the world outside, now to prove for himself what his own hands could do for him.

"God hath made man upright," says the preacher, "but he has sought out many inventions ;" and men are proud of it,- they are proud of their inventions. I have often said, How is it, beloved friends, that man has to have these inventions? Men say that "necessity is the mother of invention." It is required to invent to meet men's necessities now. But, beloved, how did man need those inventions? They are the sign of the fall. Outside of paradise, and fallen away from God, he lusts.

His belly is his god,- he craves. He is a creature made for eternity; he has, as the preacher says again, "eternity in his heart." That expression in Ecclesiastes "the world in his heart"- should be "eternity." With eternity in his heart, man tries to satisfy himself with the poor things of time. What is it that baffles all his wisdom? He has no possible invention that can enable him to do away with death, or to meet judgment. He is a creature, formed for eternity, trying to satisfy himself with a world that passes from him, and ignorant of God.

The first knowledge that we find after the fall is of his nakedness, and the first invention an apron to cover his nakedness. And so he has gone on. Now Christ comes into the scene after this fallen and wretched creature,- comes into the midst of men such as you and I are. And he says, with the fullest knowledge of man's condition, "Whosoever is athirst, let him come unto Me, and drink; he that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

The place of want, beloved friends, is the belly - the very thing that compels man to toil for satisfaction. The Lord says that he shall be so full - so satisfied, that out of that craving heart of man - out of his belly, no longer craving, but satisfied - shall flow "rivers of living water." Do you believe it, beloved friends?-do you believe it? If rivers of living water flow out of you, this means both testimony and service, surely. It implies real ministry to others, and that God is to get His own from you in the world.

Surely it does. But if this is to be true of you, what are the means by which it is to be accomplished? You are to come and drink; you are to come and receive from Him as Mary did, and you shall find that in this one thing needful all other things are contained. Even amid a ruined world paradise is returned again for him who takes this place at Jesus' feet,-this place of happy dependence to which there is no lack, eternally secured to one that finds it. "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

How sweet and wonderful is that! Do you believe it? I am sure most Christians do not believe it at all. I am afraid, beloved friends, that there are scarcely any of us that in our hearts do fully believe it. If you say you do, where then are these "rivers of living water"? Why don't they flow? What is wanting? Ah! faith in it is wanting. There is so little of it. You see, the fullness is His, it is not ours. People have the idea that grace in a man is a sort of thing that God puts as it were a seed into the soul, and it is to grow and grow and grow, and develop there into more, so that he has consciously more and more.

That is not it at all. Surely I do not mean to say that a man is not born of the incorruptible seed of the Word of God, and that as so born he does not grow. Surely he does; but that is another thing. From the very beginning of growth this ought to be true of us. Beloved, the blessedness we speak of is to be found in that which God has already given to us, if we are Christians,- that which the apostle witnesses in the second chapter of the epistle to the Colossians-in that verse of which we have often been speaking together as

the key of the epistle.

"In Christ dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and ye are filled up in Him." Now, if that is really so, you see your competence at once. God has given you your place, your part, in Him already; and think, beloved friends, that in One in whom is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily in Him we are filled up! Faith has got to have to recognize it to find the proper truth of it. Let us remember, too, that the Voice that spoke in the feast of tabernacles did not address itself to any inner circle of privilege. It was in the world He spoke. In it still, therefore, He is speaking to every weary, unsatisfied heart.

Now, I appeal to you, if there are any of you who have such. The Lord invites you, beloved friends. You say, perhaps, Well, I am afraid I don't realize my sin enough. Come to Him, then; for He is exalted to be a Prince and Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins. Come to Him. He invites men convicted of sin; but He invites them also in another character,- as thirsty and weary ones. Like Martha here - occupied with their own efforts in one kind or another - He invites them to come to Him. Whatever they are and whoever they are - not a soul but is welcome, thoroughly welcome, to Him. Alas! we are all Marthas, (not, of course, in faith,) but apt to be busy with much serving; and the last thing which we naturally think of is to come to the Lord, to find satisfaction in Him alone. Ah! is not that true of some person here? You think, If He is such a glorious Person, He must be served. If He is such a glorious Person, would He come down from heaven to earth to be served by you? Was it not more adequate faith in Mary, saying, as it were, "If He had wanted service, He would not ask for it from such poor incompetent hands as mine." "The less is blessed of the better." It is not more blessed to receive, but "it is more blessed to give than to receive." And are you trying, beloved friends, to serve Christ? Take care you are not trying to be "the better," and to make Him "the less." Are you trying to serve Him, when He had to come down from heaven to earth to serve you? Mary says, "If He has come to serve me, I will let Him do it." She is down at His feet: He says she has chosen that good part. Do you choose the "good part," and you shall have it forever.

What is the secret, beloved friends, of all the dishonor done to Him (alas!) by His people? I'll tell you,- the one thing, the secret of it is, that they are not where Mary was,- they are not in the place of real occupation with Himself. That is what the Lord wants. He has come all this weary way to attract our hearts to Himself. He wants us to receive out of His fullness,- He wants us simply to receive. Not to get us to say, after a little while, "I must be doing something now." He wants us to receive - to receive-to RECEIVE. If it is only receiving from Christ, every other responsibility will be met easily,- not by effort, but met of necessity. This will come after your own soul is fully satisfied; for the vessel must be filled itself before it can properly flow over. It is not from a vessel that is partly full that you expect an overflow. You must sit at His feet until you are filled yourself,- that is the first thing. And when filled yourself, don't think that you require effort then. Beloved, as surely as you are filled yourself, out of your belly shall flow "rivers of living water."

Alas! alas! pride is so natural to us. Man has followed Satan in that way. He would be as God. Man would still take that place, and make God his debtor. How can God be gracious? How can God give, and give, for nothing in return ?- how can that possibly be? And, beloved, if there are those who recognize this; faith has got to make it all practical, - not to make the thing true. It is true; but we those here who have these weary, restless, sinful, unsatisfied hearts, how hard it is for you to learn that He would make over to you, positively and definitely, His fullness! That is what He does.

You have only to receive; only to take the place at His feet: He will pour out His grace. I would press this as from first to last the blessed truth. It is He who applies - who appropriates to the soul all the fullness of His grace, all the value of His work.

You remember, in the third chapter of Zechariah, how Joshua the high priest is represented there, the very picture of a sinner clothed with his sins before the angel, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. There is not a word spoken by Joshua, nor a question asked of him. There is none to ask. Convicted sinner as he is, the only question is, what has God for a convicted sinner? People get into the presence of God in their sins. Many think, indeed, that they have to put away their sins and then get into the presence of God. No; nobody gets into the presence of God except in his sins, and then he is as dumb as Joshua is. The angel of the Lord says to Satan, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" And what does He say then? He says to those that stand by, "Take away his filthy garments from him;" and then He turns to the poor sinner himself, and, to make it plain to him and to us, He leaves the language of type and shadow, and to him He says, not "I have caused thy filthy garments to pass from thee," but "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." It looks like a New Testament revelation; so clear, so full is the grace announced. Poor souls that trouble themselves about their acceptance, how glad they would be to have such a voice! And yet it is for them,- written for them, - the unchanging word of the unchangeable God. Does the angel tell Joshua to appropriate this grace? No; He says, "Take away the filthy garments - take them from him," and He says to him, not even "Can you believe that your iniquity is gone?" or that "My grace is great enough?" but, in His own free and royal way, "I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee." He who speaks without repentance, and never withdraws His words, says, "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." That is how Christ ministers to one that comes to Him. Is there a soul here that needs that? Christ definitely assures you of the forgiveness of your sins. He does not say, Now, appropriate this; but He says, I appropriate it to you, and it is yours. "If we confess our sins," says the apostle,- what then? Joshua stands with those sins confessed upon him;- those sins covered him in the presence of God, and what is the result? He found God Himself acting in his behalf. It is God that appropriates the value of Christ's work to the soul. It is God that says, by the Spirit, to men, not You must do so and so, but, if you confess your sins - if you simply take that place,- I am faithful and just to forgive you your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. (i Jno. i. 9.)

Beloved, it is an immense thing to be clear as to that,- it is an immense thing to be able to give souls such assurance. Like the spies to Rahab- "Our life for yours." Those are grand words, She, as it were, says, "What can you tell me from God? Give me a true token." "Our life for yours." Oh to be able to comfort souls in that way,- to give them the positive assurance from God - those souls that would gladly accept salvation, but are busy with their acceptance of it! Oh to be able to give them a "true token" that Christ has so died for sinners,- that when you take that place as sinners before God, that blood is the true token of salvation yours, yours, YOURS!

And as we begin, so we go on. Would that we did! but I mean in God's thought. As we begin, so we go on. We get out of His gracious hand-out of His fullness, first, our acceptance with God, - that which satisfied our souls' peace and rest in His presence. But oh, beloved, is it there we stop? Are we to acquire holiness in a different way from that in which we get righteousness and peace? No, surely; just as we find Christ for righteousness, so surely we do for sanctification and all else.

We have got to receive it at His feet, to look into His blessed face, to learn of His love to rejoice in Himself; and that is true sanctification. if that is so, Christ sanctifies. Occupation with Christ is what makes our lives what they should be,- transforms our lives - transforms our very faces. Occupied with Him, looking into His face, we are changed into His image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. It is in company with Himself we find "that good part" which Mary had chosen, in "part with Him."

And as with sanctification, so with service. Oh that we may have that kind of service which will not separate us from Him-the service that flows freely, almost unconsciously, from the joy of His presence, and of the service which He renders us! Beloved, we are continually exalting ourselves, and He has to abase us. How strange and sad it is that so much of our lives we cause Him to fight against us instead of for us! Because He would have us in the place of blessing, He has to put us down, down, DOWN,- our efforts at holiness, our attempts at service, in order that He may put us in the place He has for us. How slow are we to receive in its full reality the grace that requires not, but gives,- that delights to give,- that only seeks to have objects for it; the grace that, simply as we receive it, we find, not only fullness for ourselves, but that which makes our lives full also for others. May we all learn it more simply, the power and value, not of our efforts, but of Christ Himself.

It is the "one thing" I want to say to you tonight. Don't you think it is enough? If Christ says, "But one thing is needful," what is more needful than simply to learn that "one thing"? He came not to be served - to be ministered unto, but to minister to others, yea, to give His life a ransom for many. Let Him serve, in the greatness of his love; and we shall find, not only practical fullness for daily need, but all that He is told out to us.

Whoever you are, there is no one to ask the question, when you come to Him, whether you are fit for His presence. He has no guard to His presence-chamber to ask whether you have got a right to be there. He does not want you to be kept off. Sin is no barrier even, because in the cross of Christ grace has triumphed, aye, over the "worst sin that man could possibly commit"; as the hymn says,- "The very spear that pierced His side Drew forth the blood to save."

Beloved, wherever you are, whatever you are, no soul so far from Him but I invite you to Christ to-night. There is not merely no guard to His presence-chamber to keep you out, there is the public proclamation that you are welcome there. The King's door stands open, His table is for you, beloved friends. And His presence, Lord of all, come down in grace, that His fullness may be available for us, that we may find in Him, out of His fullness, "grace upon grace."

Now, I don't want to say any thing else tonight; but "one thing is needful," and we may shut up our books.

That "one thing needful" is occupation with Christ - to sit at His feet and learn of Him. So then, if we want to serve Him, the only possible way is to receive from Him first till our hearts are so full that we cannot hold it any longer. When the vessel is once filled, all the power of the spring pours over. The overflow is not measured by the capacity of the vessel, but by the power of the spring. Think of that, beloved friends. Think of our testimony in the world being the testimony of the divine fullness,- not the measure of what we are, but the measure, so to speak, of what He is. The one thing needful for us is that our whole souls should be satisfied with Himself; and to be occupied is to be satisfied. God give us more practically, every one, to know and prove it in His grace.

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