

Luke 10:42 (J. Wilson Smith) 54657

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There is a "part" which the Lord Himself calls "good"; and this, be it observed, is not salvation with all its blessings; neither is it service with all its rewards.

True, salvation delivers the soul from judgment and brings it to God; salvation relieves the soul from the awful load of sin and its consequences, placing it in the favor of God and giving it to rejoice in Him; salvation sets the soul free and fits it to render a service of love and thanksgiving, as the Apostle writes in Titus 2: "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Thus, grace not only brings salvation, but it likewise teaches the denial of our ungodliness and worldly lusts. It saves, and then leads the soul in paths of holiness, enabling it to serve in the joy and liberty of redemption.

But, however "good" salvation may be, or however blessed and becoming is the service that the saved and happy soul delights to render, there is yet another "good" which lies within the reach of that soul.

In the closing verses of the 10th chapter of Luke, we find the Lord Jesus a guest at the house of a certain woman called Martha. A beautiful scene! Not that the Lord declined the invitation of Simon the Pharisee, or refused to enter the house of Zacchaeus the publican; not that He disdained the feast of Levi, with its crowd of publicans and sinners; or again that He found no shelter in the house where Peter's wife's mother lay sick of a fever. We find Him in each of these houses suiting Himself to the circumstances of each, but in this Bethany house there is an air of friendliness, of homely and holy intimacy, or repose and freedom, that is not to be met with in the others. "The ever homeless Stranger" found more than a welcome there. Within this house He could reckon on one who found it her delight to serve Him, and, in His own words, to serve Him "much" too. He could also count on that which, as I have already suggested, is better than service, and which as the story declares is now highly appreciated by Him. Mary had chosen "that good part." And what is this good part if it be not salvation, and if it be better than service?

We read that Martha "had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word." It was the position and occupation of Mary that drew forth His praise. She placed herself at His feet, and sitting there she heard His word. But it was not so with Martha. She was equally dear to the Lord, but not equally near to Him. And this made all the difference. The place we hold in personal communion with Christ determines our spiritual character, and forms our spiritual status. Martha was occupied with His service—Mary with Himself. To serve Him is right indeed, but service must subserve communion. To be ever occupied with service is to become "careful and troubled about many things"; but to abide in heart communion with the Master—to sit at His feet and hear His word—is to make choice of "that good part, which shall not be taken away." And surely, beloved, in a day of much widespread religious activity as the present—unprecedented perhaps since the times of the apostles—when the door is widely opened of the Lord—is there not the danger of quantity rather than quality marking our services? The surface is broad, but is the character of the work proportionately deep? Are we looking for extent or reality? Is there not room for pride when we can tabulate large results? Have we grasped in our souls the truth of Luke 14:25-35: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple"? Have we in spirit and in truth entered ourselves into such discipleship?

But then what is the secret of all this? If there be much service with little fruit that is pleasing to Him—if, as in another day, there be much sowing and little brought in that really bears the stamp of His approval—where can we find the key to that spiritual sacrifice that is acceptable to God?

Grace instructed Mary, and she discovered that key. It lay at Jesus' feet, and she accordingly laid herself there. Let us trace, chiefly, the result of her career.

In John 11 we again find her "down at His feet." While her more restless sister had gone to meet the Lord on His approach to Bethany, Mary "sat still in the house" and calmly awaited the Master's call. When it sounded she "rose up hastily and went out.... She fell down at His feet," and there, may I say, found herself at home. She did not need to retire from His presence. She had learned the blessedness of being there.

She could tarry beside Him and let Him unfold His tenderest thoughts and feelings. Oh! the blessedness of that seat! Oh! how rich are the unfoldings of divine love and truth to the soul that has found its abode there.

I will quote one more episode in Mary's life. In John 12 we have the crowning act of her truly acquired intelligence. The feast is spread before Him. His disciples are also present. Martha, true to her character, serves; Lazarus sits at meat; but Mary takes a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anoints the feet of Jesus, and wipes His feet with her hair, and the house is filled with the odor of the ointment. So rich a libation appeared prodigal and superfluous in the covetous eyes of Judas Iscariot. He would rather have seen the ointment turned into money and then given to the poor. Judas was a would-be philanthropist, "not that he cared for the poor," still less for the Lord, but money was his idol, and the love of it, his curse. At any rate, Mary's deeply significant action was nothing more in his estimation than a "waste." Poor man, blind as he was to all that was spiritual, how totally unconscious was he of the intense delight that this sacrifice occasioned to the Lord.

"Let her alone," said Jesus, "against the day of my burying hath she kept this."

But which of His disciples had apprehended the fact of His burial? Had the beloved John or the bold and energetic Peter? No, Mary alone had matured this solemn truth, and the faith which she had gathered at His feet now shone conspicuously. She alone entered into the truth of His death and burial; and now she anoints His feet with ointment, and wipes them with the hair of her head. She lays her glory at His feet.

A beautiful history is that of Mary. On each occasion, whether in Luke 10, John 11, or 12, we find her "at His feet," and therefore the quality of her service was exceedingly rich. She had found the secret of true service. She had learned that quality is to be valued above quantity. She engaged her affections with the Lord Jesus Himself, and found her fruit from Him.

I do not seek to discountenance quantity. Far be the thought. Can we do too much? Look around on the broad fields that are "white already to harvest." Harken to a hundred Macedonian cries that re-echo in our ears. Shame upon us that our feet are so tardy and our tongues so fettered. O for energy of heart and soul in seeking the salvation of the lost multitudes around us, and for the blessing of the lambs and sheep of our Shepherd's flock. Can we not say,

"My heart is full of Christ, and longs My glorious Master to declare; Of Him I'd make my loftiest strains; I cannot from His praise forbear."

But what I seek to advocate and press on myself and on all is that we should habituate ourselves to "the feet of Jesus"; to that place of self-renunciation and self-concealment; to that place of divine enlightenment and surest blessing; to that place of divine power; so that it may be less a question of giving to the poor, whatever claim they may have upon us, than one of doing it "unto Me."

If only our object be right, our service will not be wrong. If the eye be single, the whole body will be full of light, and this is needed.

The Lord give us to choose "that good part, which shall not be taken away."

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