Mark 10:21 (H. S.) 53895

Christian Truth: Volume 25, One Thing: Three "One Thing" (10:21)

"One thing thou lackest" (Mark 10:21). "One thing is needful" (Luke 10:42). "One thing I do" (Phil. 3:13).

The scriptures in which these three statements occur bring before us very different characters. In the first passage we learn that "one thing" was lacking in the rich young ruler. In the second, we learn in the story of Martha and Mary that the "one thing" lacking is the "one thing" needful. In the third scripture we find that the "one thing" needful is the "one thing" that marked the Apostle Paul.

Seeing that our Lord lays such stress upon this "one thing," it surely behooves us to search our hearts, in the light of these scriptures, with the earnest desire to be marked by this "one thing."

1. "One thing thou lackest" (Mark 10:17-22). In the story of the rich young ruler, two truths come prominently before us. First we learn that in many ways our lives may be excellent, and yet lack "one thing." Second we discover that this "one thing" is single-hearted devotedness to Christ.

Of all the different characters that came in contact with our Lord in His earthly course, none, perhaps, presents a more sorrowful end than that of this rich young ruler. There is so much at the commencement of his story that gave promise to a bright future as a disciple of Christ; yet, in the end, we read, he "went away grieved." As far as we have any record in Scripture, he is never again found in the company of Christ and His own. Therefore, even if at heart a believer, he missed the blessing of the company of Christ in the midst of His people, and failed as a witness for Christ in the world.

This young man was marked by many creature excellencies and much moral beauty. He was an earnest young man, for we read, he came "running" to the Lord. He was reverential, for he "kneeled" in His presence. He has a desire after spiritual blessings, such as eternal life. His outward life was blameless, for he had observed the outward law from his youth. All these qualities in their place are beautiful and attractive, and the Lord was not unmindful of these creature excellencies; for we read, "Jesus beholding him loved him." Yet, with all these excellencies, the Lord discerns there was "one thing" lacking.

To make manifest the one thing lacking in his life, the Lord applies three tests. As with the young man, so with ourselves; we may be living outwardly decent and blameless lives, and yet our witness for Christ be marred by the lack of "one thing." It will be well, therefore, to prove ourselves by the three tests that the Lord sets before the ruler.

He was tested by his earthly possessions.

He was tested by the cross.

3) He was tested by a Person-the rejected Christ. There was something he was asked to give up, something to take up, and Someone to follow.

The first test is earthly possessions. Taking them in the widest sense as all those things which would be an advantage to us as living in the world, we may ask, Have we weighed up all these things in the light of Christ, and counted them but loss for Christ? Have we reckoned up the advantages that birth may confer; the ease and worldly pleasures that riches can secure; the position, the honor, and dignities that intellect, or genius, or accomplishments, may command? Then, without minimizing these things, have we looked full in the face of Jesus-the One that is altogether lovely-and, seeing that He is incomparably greater than all these things, have we, in the power of affection for Christ, deliberately made the choice that Christ shall be our great Object, and not these things?

The second test is the cross. The Lord says to the young man, "Take up the cross." Are we prepared to accept the place in relation to the world in which the cross has set us before God? The Apostle could say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Gal. 6:14. The cross stands between us and our sins, the old man, and judgment; but have we also seen that it stands between us and the world? If we take up the cross, not only is the world condemned for us, but we shall be utterly refused by the world.

The third test is a rejected Christ; for the Lord says to the young man, "Follow Me." Are we prepared to identify ourselves with One who is hated and rejected by the world- One who was born in a stable, and cradled in a manger- who, •in His passage through this world, had not where to lay His head-who died an ignominious death upon a cross of shame, and was buried in a borrowed grave-One who in resurrection was still found in company with a few poor fisher folk-One who was, and still is, in the outside place of reproach? Are we prepared to go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach?

Thus, the tests in that day, as well as this, are, Can we give up earthly advantages, take a place outside the world, and follow Christ, the One who is in reproach? These tests come to us as they came to the young man, and the question for each one is, What answer shall we give?

We can answer these tests in one of two ways. First, like the young man of whom we read, he "went away grieved," we may turn back to the things of earth. He did not turn away in anger or hatred of Christ. He had no fault to find with Christ, but the world was too strong for him. Like Demas, of a later day, he loved this present world. Second, we may give an answer like Peter and the disciples, of whom we learn, they left all and followed Christ (v. 28).

The one thing the young man lacked was single-hearted devotedness to Christ. So he "went away." The disciples, with all their ignorance, their weakness, and their many failures, were drawn to Christ in affection and so left all to follow Him.

How often since that day has the history of this young man been repeated. Is there anything sadder than to look back and remember how many young men made a good start and seemed to promise well, but where are they today? In spite of excellencies such as earnestness, sincerity, and zeal, they turned back, if not to the gross world, to the corrupt religious world; and the reason is plain; they lacked the "one thing"-single-hearted devotedness to Christ, that sets Christ before the soul as the first and supreme Object of the life. It may be they put themselves before Christ, or the need of souls before Christ, or the good of saints before Christ, or service before Christ, with the result that, in the end, they turned back to the things of earth. There is not sufficient power in the love of souls, the love of saints, or the desire to serve, to keep our feet in the narrow path. Only Christ Himself can hold us in the outside place of reproach, following hard after Him.

2. "One thing is needful" (Luke 10:38-42). Passing to the touching scene at Bethany, we find two devoted women, of whom one lacked the "one thing" needful, while the other chose "that good part."

Martha, like the rich young man of Mark 10, was characterized by much that was excellent. The house at Bethany, apparently, belonged to her; and she willingly opened her home to receive the Lord of glory. Then, not only was she hospitable, but she was a busy servant in the service of the Lord. There are "many things" to be done for the Lord in this world, and Martha was occupied with these "many things." Nevertheless, with all these excellencies she had overlooked "one thing"; and she was to learn that the "one thing" she had overlooked, is the "one thing needful." In result, she was cumbered with service, irritated with her sister, and complaining before the Lord. How truly Martha represents that large class of Christians who, unconsciously to themselves, make their particular service their great object, rather than the Lord Himself. Such would engage all others as helpers in their special service, and are irritated if left "to serve alone." Lacking the "one thing," they are careful and troubled about "many things."

How right and happy to put our homes and means at the disposal of the Lord, and to be occupied in His blessed service; and yet this scene warns us that it is possible for these activities to be first in our thoughts and affections, rather than the Lord Himself. If this is so, we lack the "one thing" needful-the single-hearted devotedness that puts Christ before all service.

Of Mary we read, she chose the "good part," and that "good part" was part with Christ. For her, Christ was the supreme Object before all else, whether possessions, or service, or her sister. Having Christ as her one Object, she escaped the restlessness, the care, and trouble that marked her zealous sister. While Martha was "cumbered about much serving," Mary was calmly sitting at the feet of Jesus. When Martha came to the Lord with her complaining word, Mary "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word."

We are not left to form our spiritual judgment as to the differences between these two sisters, for we are plainly told that the Lord reproved Martha and commended Mary.

In making the Lord her Object, Mary had chosen the "good part" which was not to be taken from her. Very soon we shall leave all earthly possessions; in yet a little, service and toil will be past, but forever and ever Christ will be the portion and Object of our souls. Mary chose the eternal portion in time; she made Him her one great Object, and chose above all else to sit in His company. Other things may be taken away, but this will not be taken away. For as she chose to be with Him in time, so will she be with Him for all eternity.

Does then, this better choice-this "one thing needful"- mean that Mary neglected service for the Lord? Scripture not only rebukes such a thought, but clearly shows that she not only served the Lord, but her service was stamped with the Lord's approval in a way that is unique above all other service before or since. Here the Lord says, "Mary hath chosen that good part." In the fine scene of Matthew 26, the Lord says, "She hath wrought a good work upon Me." The one who chose the "good part," in due season does the "good work."

So high is the Lord's approval of this good work, that He says, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." (Matt. 26:10-13.)

Let us remember that the "good part" must precede the "good work." Only as Christ is our one Object will service and all else fall into its rightful place.

3. "One thing I do" (Phil. 3:13). Turning now to the third chapter of the epistle to the Philippians, we find in the Apostle one who, above all others, answered to the three tests that the Lord set before the rich young ruler. He gave up earthly possessions, he took up the cross, and he followed Christ.

First, what were the possessions that he gave up? Like the young ruler, Paul was marked by creature excellencies and worldly advantages in no small degree. He was wellborn, he was freeman of no mean city, he was highly educated, he was intensely zealous in his religion, and as touching the law he was blameless.

All these circumstances and qualities combined to give him a great place in this world. But there came a day when, like the rich young man, he came in touch with Christ. Then came the test. Could he give up all that was an advantage to him as a man in this world-all those things which made something of Paul-in order that he might make everything of Christ? Let us remember that neither the rich young ruler, nor the "young man... whose name was Saul," was asked to give up the things of shame. All realize that we cannot follow Christ and go on with the hidden things of shame. Such things we are glad enough to leave behind. The test was, and is, Can worldly advantages, human zeal, and blameless character, natural birth, religious reputation, be left behind as an object so that henceforth, instead of self, Christ may become the one Object of the life?

Instead of turning away grieved from Christ, and going back to his great possessions, like the rich young ruler, Paul forgot "those things which are behind" and reached forth unto Christ. He saw the glory of Christ, and he saw Christ in the glory. The rich ruler came in contact with Christ, but, apparently, in spite of all His wonderful miracles, he only saw in Christ a good Man; he did not see the glory of Christ. This made the great difference between these two young men. Paul saw the glory of Christ, with the immediate result that all the glory of this world-all

those things which were gain to him as a man in the flesh-were counted loss for Christ. He did not belittle these natural advantages; on the contrary, he reckoned them up, and having done so, he counted them loss when compared with the glory of Christ. His natural excellencies were eclipsed by the "excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" his Lord.

Second, there was not only what he gave up, but what he took up. In all truth he took up the cross. His one desire, as he passed through this world, was to be "made conformable unto His death"-the death of Christ. If Christ had died to the world, then Paul would have done with the world. For Paul, the cross not only ended himself as a man in the flesh, but it forever closed to him this present evil world.

Third, having given up all his natural advantages as the object of his life, having taken up the cross which closed the world, he followed Christ as the one Object of his life. He turned his back on all earthly religion; he went outside the camp unto Christ, bearing His reproach. Henceforth Christ was his one Object, for he can say:

"For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21);

"That I may win Christ" (chap. 3:8);

"Be found in Him" (chap. 3:9);

"That I may know Him" (chap. 3:10).

Here then was a man who could say in all truth, the one thing that ruler lacked, the "one thing" that Martha had to learn is needful, is the "ONE THING I DO." Henceforth his life was a life of single-hearted devotedness to. Christ. For him, Christ was the one supreme Object-not sinners, not saints, not service-but Christ. No one was ever more zealous in preaching the gospel of the grace of God to sinners, no one ever cared for all the churches like the Apostle, no one was more untiring in service; but above all and before all, Christ was his one Object. He did not lack the "one thing" like the ruler; he was not distracted by "many things" like Martha. He had before him one thing- to follow Christ. Thus it was he forgot "those things which are behind" and reached forth unto "those things which are before."

Moreover, he lets us know what these things are. He shows us very clearly that they all center in Christ.

Christ in the glory (chap. 2:9, 10).

The calling on high of God in Christ Jesus (chap. 3:14).

The coming of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (chap. 3:20).

Being "fashioned like unto His glorious body" (chap. 3:21).

How good then to make Christ our one Object. If we make service our object, we shall end in seeking to exalt ourselves. If we make sinners our object, we shall in all probability be drawn back into the world. If we make saints our object, they will break our hearts. But if Christ is our first and supreme Object, we shall, like the Apostle, fight a good fight, finish the course, and keep the faith; for Christ alone can hold our feet in the narrow path, guide us through every difficulty, and sustain us in the presence of every opposition. May we then in our little measure be able to say with the Apostle, "One thing I do... I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Chap. 3:13, 14.

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