

## ONLY ONE THING IS NEEDED

Once upon a time, many years ago, there lived a king who had a beautiful daughter. This princess had many offers of marriage, but she couldn't make up her mind. A romantic girl, she wanted a man who would love her more than he loved anything else. Finally, she devised a way to test the love of her suitors.

An announcement was made and sent throughout the kingdom that on a certain day, there would be a race. The winner of the race would marry the princess. The race was open to every man in the kingdom, regardless of his position. All that was required was that the man had to love the princess more than he loved anything else.

On the chosen day, men rich and poor gathered at the starting line. Each man was told that the princess waited at the finish line. Whoever reached her first could take her as his bride. Just before the race was to begin, the king made an announcement. Not wanting any man to run in vain, the king had liberally scattered some of his finest treasures along the course. There were necklaces and pendants and jewel-encrusted cups and swords and knives. Each runner was welcome to take as many as he liked. The race was begun.

One by one, the runners, princes and paupers alike, turned aside to fill their pockets and carry off what treasures they could. Blinded by the immediate promise of wealth, they forgot the princess and all their professions of love. All except one. He pressed on, ignoring what to him were trinkets when compared to the incomparable beauty of the princess, finally crossing the finish line, the winner. Only one was victorious, and that was because he kept his eye on the prize.

Jesus was visiting in the home of two sisters, Mary and Martha. You know the story well. Martha hurried about doing all the household preparations necessary to make her guest feel at home. At the same time, Mary sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he had to say. Martha finally got fed up. "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Mary had only done one thing—she sat at the feet of Jesus. But that one thing was enough to draw Jesus' praise. It is a priceless story with a very important message: You can't work your way into the Kingdom of God. You can only receive it.

Pastor John Gable tells about Al and Betty Johnson who live on a farm about 200 miles northeast of Rapid City, S. D. Not many folks live in or around Rapid City. Needless to say, there isn't a Wal-Mart on every corner, so whenever the Johnsons have a reason to go into the city, they keep a running list of things they

want to do and need to buy. A while back, Betty's mother was flying in for a visit. Al made a list of all the things he needed to do on his way to the airport to pick up his mother-in-law.

When he finally got home late that evening, he was so pleased to tell Betty about all he had accomplished. He had gotten new tires on the truck and found everything she wanted at the mall. He had even bought her a new dress that he couldn't wait to show her. Finally, she interrupted him and asked, "Al, where's Mom?" Poor Al's face turned ashen, and then red. It seems, in his determination to complete the list; he had forgotten to go to the airport. He had forgotten the only real purpose he had for going to town in the first place.

Poor Al. It's easy to do, to be so busy that you forget the one thing you were supposed to do.

Martha was hurrying around doing those little things that are so important to someone having guests in her home, and we know Jesus appreciated her efforts. Mary and Martha became two of Jesus' closest friends. It was with kindness that Jesus gently scolded Martha. I suspect he did it with a smile on his face. It was a loving rebuke. "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better..." Only one thing is needed. That is what Jesus said to Martha. Only one thing.

There is a time-honored story about a young man fresh out of seminary who was called to his first pastorate in a small, farming community. Having to preach every Sunday was quite a challenge for this young man who was accustomed to the world of academia, not the world of the small, country church. Each Sunday he preached sermons that were little more than lengthy quotations taken directly from his seminary classroom notes—dry, academic stuff, to be sure.

The congregation was used to having ministers fresh out of seminary. In fact over the years they had become quite patient and tolerant. They understood themselves as a congregation gifted with the task of training young ministers in the realities of church life.

Months went by as this congregation waited for the young man to work his way into his new role of pastor and teacher. Then one Sunday the elder who prepared the sanctuary for the service left a note on the pulpit. On a small piece of paper he wrote a bible reference, John 12:21. That's all it said, John 12:21.

Well, the young minister arrived not long afterward, and he too went into the sanctuary to prepare for the morning's service. He saw the note on the pulpit which read "John 12:21." A curious thing to find in the pulpit, he thought, so he quickly thumbed through his bible and found the passage which read in part: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Christ is that one thing that is needed. Mary understood that intuitively. Christianity is not about doing good, though that is a major witness to our faith. The best Christians I know are continually doing acts of

love and charity. Christianity is not about keeping commandments, though the best Christians I know seek to keep all the commandments, especially that one about loving your neighbor as yourself. CHRISTIANITY AT ITS HEART IS THE RECOGNITION THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE LORD OF LIFE. He is our Master and our Savior. What do you need to be saved? Believe in our Lord, Jesus Christ. Paul writes in Colossians 1, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”

Several years ago Dr. John Claypool tells of receiving as a Christmas gift a book by J.B. Phillips called WHEN GOD WAS MAN. John Claypool was reading the book and happened to leave it open on a chair in the den. He and his wife went out for the evening. A lady in the community came to baby sit for their little boy. When they came home that night, Claypool said that he could tell as soon as he entered the house that the baby sitter was very excited. She picked up his book and began to wave it around, and asked, is this true? When did it happen? What was he like?

Claypool said that to be honest, he was taken aback because he knew this person. She was very active in a local church; she even sang in the choir. He was surprised that title—WHEN GOD WAS MAN—would have come as such a shock to her. But as they began to talk, he discovered that, for all her years of churchly activity, somehow the word had never reached her that, at one point in history, God did become a human being; that is, the One who is eternal entered time; the One who had always inhabited the heavens chose to come and live as a human being upon this earth.

As they talked about this event, she asked all kinds of questions as to what it meant. They talked late into the night, the woman excitedly coming to grips with the awesome idea that God had become human for her sake.

Have you ever come to grips with that truth in your own life? I know many of you are engaged in doing good works, both at home and in the community. You are responsible, hardworking, law-abiding people. And I am thankful for each and every one of you. But do you still have emptiness within? Do you sometimes feel that you’ve lived your life in vain? Do you hunger for something more? Maybe it has something to do with your understanding of Christ. He is more than a good teacher, more than a prophet. He is the very source of our lives, and he is the promise of new life in the Spirit. Someone has described him like this:

TO ARTISTS, HE IS THE ONE ALTOGETHER LOVELY.

TO ARCHITECTS, HE IS THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE.

TO DOCTORS, HE IS THE GREAT PHYSICIAN.

TO PREACHERS, HE IS THE WORD OF GOD.

TO PHILOSOPHERS, HE IS THE WISDOM OF GOD.

TO THE DYING, HE IS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

TO GEOLOGISTS, HE IS THE ROCK OF AGES.

TO FARMERS, HE IS THE LORD OF THE HARVEST.

TO PROFESSORS, HE IS THE MASTER TEACHER.

TO PRODIGALS, HE IS THE FORGIVING PARENT.

TO LOST SHEEP, HE IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

TO THIRSTY SOULS, HE IS THE WATER OF LIFE.

TO THE HUNGRY, HE IS THE BREAD OF LIFE.

TO PHILANTHROPISTS, HE IS GOD'S UNSPEAKABLE GIFT.

Let me tell you a true story of someone who came to see in his own life who Christ is. Walt was a sixteen-year-old street tough in Brooklyn, New York. "My parents," he remembers, "were good people, but they didn't have much money. We looked out our windows on streets smelling of garbage. I went to school every day, but I was illiterate. Like most of my friends, I joined a gang and became its leader."

One evening Walt stood with his friends in Prospect Park. They were waiting to fight a rival gang that never showed. As Walt and his friends walked out of the park, they saw a man preaching right there on the street corner. "He was saying how God loved us and could forgive us and how life could change. We started mocking him because there was nothing better to do. I never saw that man again," Walt recalls. But later that evening, he writes, "I was overwhelmed by a presence that I didn't even know enough to call Christ... That night I fell into a deep sleep, during which I dreamt that the garbage outside my window had turned into roses. When I awoke, I knew my future would be different."

That is the testimony of the Reverend Dr. Walter Ungerer, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Kokomo, Indiana. "I was overwhelmed by a presence I didn't even know enough to call Christ."

Have you discovered that presence in your life? Many of you are very busy people. You're busy in the church; you're busy in the community. You're busy in your work. You are a productive person and you are successful. But have you found that one thing that is needed, that one thing that will transform you and give

you a peace that surpasses understanding? Take a clue from Martha's sister Mary. The most important thing you can do is to take a few moments each day and sit at the feet of Jesus.