

MOUNT HERMON UNITED

ONE THING - STEPHEN VENABLE

I. MARY OF BETHANY

A. Context for the Scene

Feeding of the 5000 and Decisive Teaching in the Synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:3-65) → Testing of Disciples and Affirmation of His Identity (John 6:66-71, Mt 16:13-20, Lk 9:18-21) → Revelation of Messianic Suffering and Call to Discipleship (Mt 16:21-28, Lk 9:22-27) → Mt. of Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-13, Lk 9:28-36) → 2nd Prediction of Suffering (Lk 9:37-45) → Journey to Feast of Tabernacles (Lk 9:51, Jn 7:10-8:59)

B. Hearing His Word

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house... And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word...But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her. Lk 10:38-42

1. Having likely been told of the journey of Jesus toward Jerusalem by one of the pairs sent out (Lk 10:1-2), Martha welcomes Him into her home.
2. There on the outskirts of Jerusalem, just over six months before His death, Jesus found a heart ready to hear Him. Mary found the One her soul loved and fell at His feet to imbibe His words.
3. Jesus not only defends the posture of Mary's heart, but emphatically reiterates the *one thing* the Father audibly commanded His disciples: *the one necessary thing* was to *listen to Him*.

II. THE ONE NECESSARY THING

A. Seeking and Finding

One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in His temple. Psalm 27:4

1. The one needful thing that David pursued and that Mary of Bethany embodied was a very specific posture of the heart focused on *beholding* and *listening*. The ideas of hearing and seeing are consistently connected in the Bible. To hear is to behold, and to gaze is to listen.
“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory ...” Jn 17:24
2. This corresponds to the quality Jesus consistently sought from those who followed Him: *ears to hear and eyes to see*. Wisdom Himself beckons us to be those *who listen and behold*. It is this posture of heart in prayer that is the *primary* (not only) doorway into living knowledge of the worth of Jesus.

B. Being a Hearer of the Word

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you... admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Col 3:16 (cf. Jn 15:7)

1. The act of inclining our ear to the oracles of God is the path to living understanding (Eph 1:17, Col 1:9-10). We are to treasure His word, rejoice in it, and eat it (cf. Ps 19:8-10, Ps 119, Is. 55:1-3, Ezek 3:1-3, Jer 15:16)
2. The act of doing this is referred to as *meditation* in Scripture, and it is absolutely vital to possess a revelation of its significance and a vision to practice it. (Gen 24:63, Josh 1:8, Ps 1:2, 4:4, 19:4, 63:6, 77:6, 77:12, 119, 104:34, 143:5, 145:5, Mal 3:16, Phil 4:8, 1 Tim 4:14-16)
3. Supplication primarily impacts our outward circumstances, intercession primarily impacts others (people, nations, issues) but it is *meditation* that primarily impacts our interior life. Practically this mostly consists of slowly *speaking* and *singing* small biblical phrases with love and adoration.

C. Beholding Jesus

1. Meditation rightly looks to God and His ways as its object (Ps 145:5). We *behold* the Father, Son, and Spirit and *listen* to all they have revealed. Yet there is a special place that Jesus holds in meditation.
2. Through the *incarnation*, Jesus is the height of the revelation of the knowledge of God. This is primarily expressed in Scripture through His identity as *Word/Wisdom* and *Light/Image*. (Jn 1:1-18, 12:46, 14:6-8, 2 Cor 4:6, Col 2:2-3, 9, Heb 1:1-3, 1 John 1:1-3)
3. If we desire to relate to Jesus, we must be those who *listen* and *behold* because *that is who He is!*

“For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” 2 Cor 4:6

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

4. In this prayerful posture (meditation) of *listening* to Jesus and *gazing* on His beauty we enter into the true knowledge of Him (2 Pet 1:8) and acquire spiritual understanding (Eph 1:17, Col 1:9) of His surpassing worth (Phil 3:8-11, Rev 5:9-12).

III. THE OFFERING

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany... there they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard (broke the flask and poured it on His head – Mt 26:6-7) and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. John 12:1-3

A. A Memorial of Love

1. The specific words Jesus spoke to Mary in the scene six months prior to this are not recorded. Yet from the context of that scene and what transpires here, it seems almost certain that Jesus had entrusted to Mary what He had only shared with the twelve at that point – *the revelation of His suffering*.
2. Unlike the disciples, Mary had actually heard Him and believed Him apart from any personal agenda. She had trusted and loved Jesus for *who He was, on His terms*. Deep in her soul so filled with love for this Man who spoke like no other, she vowed that He would have her whole inheritance as a token of affection before His death.
3. And so it was that on the eve of His final entry into Jerusalem, Jesus sat at the table of the Sabbath feast in Bethany being held in His honor. A short time before, Jesus had raised Mary’s brother Lazarus from the dead and the gratitude she had for Him swelled in her heart (Jn 11:1-46).
4. All the more reasonable did it seem to pour out her life and future upon Him. At last, there in the house of Simon, Mary acted on the vow she had made in the silence of her soul almost six months before. Breaking the flask and ‘wasting’ it upon Jesus, she filled the house with the fragrance of her love for Him, and covering them both was the testimony of how precious He was to her.

B. The Scandal of His Worth and the Wisdom of the Waste

1. The Scandal of His Worth

But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor... But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, who would betray Him, said, “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” Mt 26:8-9, Jn 12:4-5

- a. Though Judas is highlighted, many of the disciples were indignant because of the extravagance of what Mary had done. The worth of the oil (Mk 14:5, Jn 12:5) has very significant context. The sum needed to purchase bread for the multitude would have been *200 denarii* (Mk 6:37, Jn 6:7).
- b. The disciples did not yet perceive the worth of Jesus in a way that caused them to view Mary’s offering as *fitting, reasonable, and wise*. They thought such a treasure had been *wasted*.

2. The Wisdom of the Waste

But Jesus said, “Let her alone, why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. She had done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. Assuredly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” Mark 14:6-9

- a. Mary had sat at the feet of Jesus, heard His word, and perceived a glimpse of the unsearchable riches of His worth (Eph 3:8). She did what she could and gave all that she had *for His sake*.
- b. So dear was this act to Jesus that He decreed a perpetual, worldwide memorial to this young woman who never appears again in Church History.
- c. Extravagant, sacrificial acts of voluntary love will never emerge out of distracted lives of shallow devotion. We must behold His glory, encounter His worth, and pour out our lives for His fame.