

MARTHA AND MARY

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“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, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”
Luke 10:38-42.

IT is not an easy thing to maintain the balance of our spiritual life. No one can be spiritually healthy who does not meditate and commune, no man, on the other hand, is as he should be unless he is active and diligent in holy service. David sweetly sang, “He makes me to lie down in green pastures,” there was the contemplative, “He leads me beside the still waters,” there was the active and progressive, the difficulty is to maintain the two, and to keep each in its relative proportion to the other. We must not be so active as to neglect communion, nor so contemplative as to become unpractical. In the chapter from which our text is taken, we have several lessons on this subject.

The seventy disciples returned from their preaching tour flushed with the joy of success, and our Savior, to refine that joy, and prevent its degenerating into pride, bids them rather rejoice that their names were written in heaven. He conducted their contemplations to the glorious doctrine of election, that grateful thoughts might sober them after successful work. He bids them consider themselves as debtors to the grace which reveals unto babes the mysteries of God, for He would not allow their new position as workers to make them forget that they were the chosen of God, and therefore debtors.

Our wise Master next returns to the subject of service, and instructs them by the memorable parable of the good Samaritan and the wounded man, and then as if they might vainly imagine philanthropy, as it is the service of Christ, to be the only service of Christ, and to be the only thing worth living for, He brings in the two sisters of Bethany, the Holy Ghost meaning thereby to teach us that while we ought to abound in service, and to do good abundantly to our fellow men, yet we must not fail in worship, in spiritual reverence, in meek discipleship, and quiet contemplation. While we are practical, like the seventy, practical like the Samaritan, practical like Martha, we are also, like the Savior, to rejoice in spirit, and say, “Father, I thank You,” and we are also, like Mary, to sit down in quietude and nourish our souls with divine truth.

This short narrative I suppose might be paraphrased something after this fashion. Martha and Mary were two most excellent sisters, both converted, both lovers of Jesus, both loved by Jesus, for we are expressly told that He loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus. They were both women of a choice spirit, our Savior’s selection of their house as a frequent resort proved that they were an unusually gracious family.

They are persons representative of different forms of excellence, and I think it altogether wrong to treat Martha as some have done, as if she had no love for good things, and was nothing better than a mere worldling. It was not so. Martha was a most estimable and earnest woman, a true believer, and an ardent follower of Jesus, whose joy it was to entertain Jesus at the house of which she was the mistress. When our Lord made His appearance on this occasion at Bethany, the first thought of Martha was, “Here is our most noble guest, we must prepare for Him a sumptuous entertainment.” Perhaps she

marked our Savior's weariness, or saw some traces of that exhaustion which made Him look so much older than He was, and she therefore set to work with the utmost diligence to prepare a feast for Him. She was careful about many things, and as she went on with her preparations, fresh matters occurred to ruffle her mind, and she became worried, and being somewhat vexed that her sister took matters so coolly, she begged the Master to upbraid her.

Now Mary had looked upon the occasion from another point of view. As soon as she saw Jesus come into the house she thought, "What a privilege have I now to listen eagerly to such a teacher, and to treasure up His precious words! He is the Son of God, I will worship, I will adore, and every word He utters shall be stored in my memory." She forgot the needs both of the Master and His followers, for her faith saw the inner glory which dwelt within Him, and she was so overpowered with reverence, and so wrapt in devout wonder, that she became oblivious of all outward things.

She had no faults to find with Martha for being so busy, she did not even think of Martha, she was altogether taken up with her Lord and with those gracious words which He was speaking. She had no will either to censure or to praise or to think even of herself, everything was gone from her but her Lord and the word which He was uttering. See you then, that Martha was serving Christ, and so was Mary; Martha meant to honor Christ, so did Mary; they both agreed in their design, they differed in their way of carrying it out, and while Martha's service is not censured (only her being cumbered comes under the censure), yet Mary is expressly commended, as having chosen the good part, and therefore we do Martha no injustice if we show wherein she came short, and wherein Mary excelled.

Our first observation will be this, *the Martha spirit is very prevalent in the church of God just now*, in the second place, *the Martha spirit very much injures true service*, and in the third place, *the Mary spirit is the source of the noblest form of consecration*.

I. THE MARTHA SPIRIT IS VERY PREVALENT IN THE CHURCH at this period—prevalent in some quarters to a mischievous degree, and among us all to a perilous extent.

What do we intend by saying that the Martha spirit is prevalent just now? We mean first, that *there is a considerable tendency among Christian people, in serving Christ, to aim at making a fair show in the flesh*. Martha wanted to give our Lord a right worthy entertainment which should be a credit to her house and to her family, and herein she is commendable far above those slovens who think anything good enough for Christ. So also, among professing Christians, there is at this present a desire to give to the cause of Christ buildings notable for their architecture and beauty. We must have no more barns, our meeting houses must exhibit our improving taste, if possible, our chapels must be correctly Gothic or sternly classical in all their details, both without and within.

As to the service, we must cultivate the musical and the tasteful. We are exhorted not to be barely decent, but to aim at the sublime and beautiful. Our public worship, it is thought, should be impressive if not imposing, care should be taken that the music should be chaste, the singing conformed to the best rules of the art, and the preaching eloquent and attractive. So everything in connection with Christian labor should be made to appear generous and noble, by all means the subscription lists must be kept up, each denomination must excel the other in the amount of its annual funds, for surely everything done for Christ ought to be done in the best possible style. Now in all this there is much that is good, so much that is really intended to honor the Lord, so we see no room to censure, but yet show we unto you a more excellent way. These things you may do, but there are higher things which you must do, or suffer loss.

Brethren, there is something better to be studied than the outward, for though this may be aimed at with a single eye to God's glory, and we judge no man, yet we fear the tendency is to imagine that mere externals are precious in the Master's sight. I believe He counts it a very small matter whether your house be a cathedral or a barn, to the Savior it is small concern whether you have organs or whether you have not, whether you sing after the choicest rules of psalmody or no, He looks at your hearts, and if these ascend to Him He accepts the praise. As for those thousands of pounds annually contributed, He estimates them not by the weights of the merchant but after the balances of the sanctuary. Your love expressed in your gifts He values, but what are the mere silver and gold to Him? Funds, and encouraging

accounts, and well-arranged machineries are well if they exist as the outgrowth of fervent love, but if they are the end-all, and the be-all, you miss the mark. Jesus would be better pleased with a grain of love than a heap of ostentatious service.

The Martha spirit shows itself *in the censuring of those persons who are careful about Christ's word*, who stand up for the doctrines of the Gospel, who desire to maintain the ordinances as they were delivered unto them, and who are scrupulous and thoughtful, and careful concerning the truth as it is in Jesus. In newspapers, on platforms, and in common talk, you frequently hear earnest disciples of Jesus and consistent believers in His doctrines snubbed and denounced as unpractical. Theological questions are scouted as mere impertinences. Go in for ragged schools, certainly; reclaim the Arabs of the street, by all manner of means; pass a compulsory education bill, certainly; soup kitchens, free dinners, all excellent; we can all join in these, but never mention creeds and doctrines.

Why, man, you cannot be aware of the enlightenment of our times! What importance can now be attached to mere biblical dogmas and ordinances? Why contend as to whether baptism shall be performed upon a babe or upon a believer, whether it shall be by sprinkling or by immersion? What matters the law of Christ in such a case? These things would do for the schoolmen of the dark ages to fight about, but what can be the importance of such trifles in this highly enlightened nineteenth century?

Yes, that is the exaggeration of Martha. Mary, treasuring up every word of Christ, Mary counting each syllable a pearl, is reckoned to be unpractical, if not altogether idle. That spirit, I fear, is growing in these times, and needs to be checked, for after all, there is truth and there is error, and charitable talk cannot alter the fact. To know and to love the Gospel is no small thing. Obedience to Jesus, and anxiety to learn His will so as to please Him in all things, are not secondary matters. Contemplation, worship, and growth in grace are not unimportant.

I trust we shall not give way to the spirit which despises our Lord's teaching, for if we do, in prizing the fruit and despising the root we shall lose the fruit and the root too. In forgetting the great well-spring of holy activity, namely, personal piety, we shall miss the streams also. From the sincerity of faith and the fervor of love practical Christianity must arise, and if the food that faith and love feed upon is withdrawn, if sitting at the feet of Jesus be regarded as of secondary consequence, then both strength and will to serve the Lord will decline.

I dread much the spirit which would tamper with truth for the sake of united action, or for any object under heaven—the latitudinarian spirit, which sneers at creeds and dogmas. Truth is no trifle. Not so thought our fathers, when at the stake they gave themselves to death, or on the brown heather of Scotland fell beneath the swords of Claverhouse's dragoons for truths which nowadays men count unimportant, but which, being truths, were to them so vital that they would sooner die than suffer them to be dishonored. O for the same uncompromising love of truth! Would to God we could be both active and studious, and both learn with Mary and work with Martha!

The Martha spirit crops up *in our reckoning so many things necessary*. Martha believed that to make Christ an entertainment, there must be many things prepared, and as to leaving one of those things out—it could not be. Our Lord would have been satisfied enough with the simplest fare, a piece of fish or of a honeycomb would well have contented Him, but no, according to Martha's judgment there must be this, and there must be that.

So is it with many good people now. They have their ideas of excellence, and if these cannot be realized, they despair of doing anything acceptable for Christ. I believe an educated ministry to be desirable, but none the less do I deplore the spirit which considers it to be essential. In the presence of the fishermen of Galilee we dare not subscribe to the necessity which with some is beyond doubt. You must not, according to the talk of some, allow these earnest young people to set about preaching, and your converted colliers and fiddlers should be stopped at once. The Holy Ghost has in all ages worked by men of His own choosing, but some churches would not let Him if they could help it. Their pulpits are closed against the most holy and useful preachers, if they have not those many things with which the church nowadays cumbers her ministers and herself.

Then, my brethren, to carry on a good work, it is thought needful to have a society and large funds. I also approve of the society and the funds, I only regret that they should be so viewed as prime necessities that few will stir without them. The idea of sending out a missionary with a few pounds in his hands as in the days of Carey, is set down in many quarters as absurd. How can you save souls without a committee? How can London be evangelized till you have raised at least a million of money? Can you hope to see men converted without an annual meeting in Exeter Hall? You must have a secretary—there is no moving an inch till he is elected, and know you not that without a committee you can do nothing? All these and a thousand things which time fails me to mention, are now deemed to be needful for the service of Jesus, until a true-hearted soul who could do much for his Lord, scarcely dares to move till he has put on Saul's *armor of human patronage*.

O for apostolic simplicity, going everywhere preaching the Word, and consecrating the labor of every believer to soul-winning. To bring us back to first principles, "one thing is needful," and if by sitting at Jesus' feet we can find that one thing, it will stand us in better stead than all the thousand things which custom now demands. To catch the Spirit of Christ, to be filled with Himself, this will equip us for godly labor as nothing else ever can. May all Christians yet come to put this one thing first and foremost, and count the power of deep piety to be the one essential qualification for holy work.

The censurable quality in the Martha spirit appears in *the satisfaction which many feel with mere activity*. To have done so much preaching, or so much Sunday school teaching, to have distributed so many tracts, to have made so many calls by our missionaries, all this seems to be looked at as end rather than means. If there be so much effort put forth, so much work is done, is it not enough? Our reply is, it is not enough, it is nothing without the divine blessing. Brethren, where mere work is prized, and the inner life forgotten, prayer comes to be at a discount. The committee is attended, but the devotional meeting forsaken. The gathering together for supplication is counted little compared with the collecting of subscriptions. The opening prayer at public meetings is regarded as a very proper thing, but there are those who regard it as a mere formality, which might be very well laid aside, and therefore, invariably come in after prayer is over. It will be an evil day for us when we trust in the willing and the running, and practically attempt to do without the Holy Spirit.

This lofty estimate of mere activity, for its own sake, throws the acceptance of our work into the shade. The Martha spirit says, if the work is done, is not that all? The Mary spirit asks whether Jesus is well-pleased or no. All must be done in His name, and by His Spirit, or nothing is done. Restless service, which sits not at His feet, is but the clattering of a mill which turns without grinding corn, it is but an elaborate method of doing nothing. I do not want less activity—how earnestly do I press you to it almost every Sabbath day, but I do pray that we may feel that all our strength lies in God, and that we can only be strong as we are accepted of Christ, and only can be accepted in Christ as we wait upon Him in prayer, trust Him, and live upon Him.

You may compass sea and land to make your proselytes, but if you have not the Spirit of Christ, you are none of His. You may rise up early and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows, but unless you trust in the Lord your God you shall not prosper. The joy of the Lord is your strength. They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. Without Christ you can do nothing. Has He not told you, "He who abides in me, and I in Him, the same brings forth much fruit"? Was it not written of old, "I am like a green fir tree: from me is your fruit found"?

Once more, Martha's spirit is predominant in the church of God to a considerable extent now, in *the evident respect which is paid to the manifest, and the small regard which is given to the secret*. All regenerated persons ought to be workers for God and with God, but let the working never swamp the believing, never let the servant be more prominent than the son, never, because you conduct a class, or are chief man at a village station, forget that you are a sinner saved by grace, and still have need to be looking to the Crucified, and finding all your life in Him. You lose your strength as a worker if you forget your dependence as a believer. To labor for Christ is a pleasant thing, but beware of doing it mechanically, and this you can only prevent by diligently cultivating personal communion with Christ.

My brother, it may be you will undertake so much service that your time will be occupied, and you will have no space for prayer and reading the Word. The half-hour in the morning for prayer will be cut short, and the time allotted for communion with God in the evening will be gradually entrenched upon by this engagement and the other occupation, and when this is the case I tremble for you. You are killing the steed by spurring it and denying it food, you are undermining your house by drawing out the stones from the foundation to pile them at the top. You are doing your soul serious mischief if you put the whole of your strength into that part of your life which is visible to men, and forget that portion of your life which is secret between you and your God.

To gather up all in one, I fear there is a great deal among us of religious activity of a very inferior sort, it concerns itself with the external of service, it worries itself with merely human efforts, and it attempts in its own strength to achieve divine results. The real working which God will accept is that which goes hand in hand with a patient waiting upon Christ, with heart searching, with supplication, with communion, with a childlike dependence upon Jesus, with a firm adhesion to His truth, with an intense love to His person, and an abiding in Him at all seasons, may we have more of such things. Martha's spirit, though excellent in itself so far as it goes, must not overshadow Mary's quiet, deep-seated piety, or evil will come of it.

II. Secondly, we observe that THE MARTHA SPIRIT INJURES TRUE SERVICE.

Service may be true, and yet somewhat marred upon the wheel. Give your attention not so much to what I say, as to the bearing of it upon yourselves. It may be that you will find, as we speak, that you have been verily guilty touching these things. The Martha spirit *brings the least welcome offering to Christ*. It is welcome, but it is the least welcome. Our Lord Jesus when on earth was more satisfied by conversing to a poor Samaritan woman than He would have been by the best meat and drink. In carrying on His spiritual work He had meat to eat that His disciples knew not of. Evermore His spiritual nature was predominant over His physical nature, and those persons who brought Him spiritual gifts brought Him the gifts which He preferred. Here then was Martha's dish of well-cooked meat, but there was Mary's gift of a humble obedient heart; here was Martha decking the table, but there was Mary submitting her judgment to the Lord, and looking up with wondering eyes as she heard His matchless speech. Mary was bringing to Jesus the better offering. With Martha, He would in His condescension be pleased, but in Mary He found satisfaction. Martha's service He accepted benevolently, but Mary's worship He accepted with complacency.

Now, brethren and sisters, all that you can give to Christ in any shape or form will not be so dear to Him as the offering of your fervent love, the clinging of your humble faith, the reverence of your adoring souls. Do not, I pray you, neglect the spiritual for the sake of the external, or else you will be throwing away gold to gather to yourself iron, you will be pulling down the palaces of marble that you may build for yourselves hovels of clay.

Martha's spirit has this mischief about it also, that *it brings self too much to remembrance*. We would not severely judge Martha, but we conceive that in some measure she aimed at making the service a credit to herself as the mistress of the house, at any rate, self came up when she began to grow weary, and complained that she was left to serve alone. *We* also want our work to show well as *our* work, we like those who see it to commend it, and if none commend it we feel that we are hardly done by, and are left to work alone. Now, to the extent in which I think of myself in my service I spoil it. Self must sink, and Christ be all in all. John the Baptist's saying must be our motto, "He must increase, I must decrease," for Jesus' shoe-latchet we are not worthy to unloose. Too much work and too little fellowship will always bring self into prominence. Self must be prayed down, and fellowship with Jesus must keep it down.

Martha seemed to fancy *that what she was doing was needful for Christ*. She was cumbered about much serving because she thought it necessary that there should be a noble entertainment for the Lord. We are all too apt to think that Jesus wants our work, and that He cannot do without us. The preacher inquires what would become of the church if he were removed! the deacon is suspicious that if he were

taken away there would be a great gap left in the executive of the church, the teacher of a class feels that those children would never be converted, Christ would miss of the travail of His soul but for him. Ah, but a fly on St. Paul's Cathedral might as well imagine that all the traffic at his feet was regulated by his presence, and would cease should he remove. I love you to think that Christ will do much work by you, and to attach as much weight as you can to your responsibilities, but as to Jesus needing us—the thing is preposterous. Mary is much wiser when she feels, “He desires me to receive His words, and yield Him my love. I would gladly give Him meat, but He will see to that, He is the Master of all things, and can do without me or Martha. I need Him far more than He can need me.”

We spoil our service when we overestimate its importance, for this leads us into loftiness and pride. Martha, under the influence of this high temper, came to complain of her sister, and to complain of her Lord too, as if He were excusing her idleness. “Do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?” How it spoils what we do for Christ when we go about it with a haughty spirit, when we feel, “I can do this, and it is grand to do that, am not I somewhat better than others? Must not my Master think well of me?” The humble worker wins the day. God accepts the man who feels his nothingness, and out of the depths cries to Him, but the great ones He will put down from their seat, and send the rich ones empty away. Activity, if not balanced by devotion, tends to puff us up, and so to prevent acceptance with God.

Martha also fell into *an unbelieving vexation*. Her idea of what was necessary to be done was so great that she found she could not attain to it. There must be this side dish, and there must be that principal joint, there must be this meat and that wine, it must be cooked just so many minutes, this must be done to a turn, and so on, and so on, and so on, and so on, and now time flies, she fears yonder guest has been slighted, that servant is not back from the market, many things go wrong when you are most anxious to have them right. You good housewives, who may have had large parties to prepare for, know what these cares mean, I dare say, and something of the sort troubled Martha, so that she became fretful and unbelieving. She had a work to do beyond her strength as she thought, and her faith failed her, and her unbelief went petulantly to complain to her Lord.

Have we never erred in the same way? We must have that Sunday school excellently conducted, that morning prayer meeting must be improved, that Bible class must be revived, our morning sermon must be a telling one, and so on! The preacher here speaks of himself, for he sometimes feels that there is too much responsibility laid upon his shoulders, and he is very apt in reviewing his great field of labor to grow desponding in spirit. But when the preacher confessed that he spoke of himself, he only did so because he represents his fellow workers, and you also grow faint and doubtful. Alas! in such a case, the enjoyment of service evaporates, the fretfulness which pines over details spoils the whole, and the worker becomes a mere drudge and scullion instead of an angel who does God's commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His Word. Instead of glowing and burning like seraphs, our chariot wheels are taken off by our anxiety, and we drag heavily. Faith it is that secures acceptance, but when unbelief comes in, the work falls flat to the ground.

At such times when the man or the church shall become subject to the Martha spirit, *the voluntary principle falls a little into disrepute*. I believe the voluntary principle is the worst thing in all the world to work where there is no grace, but where there is grace it is the one principle that God accepts. Now, Martha would have Mary *made* to serve Christ. What right has she to be sitting down there? whether she likes it or not she must get up and wait like her sister. Martha's voluntary desire to do much, leads her to think that Mary, if she has not quite such a voluntary love for the work must be driven to it, must have a sharp word from Christ about it.

So it is with us. We are so willing to contribute to the Lord's work, that we wish we had ten thousand times as much to give. Our heart is warm within us, and we feel we would make no reserve, and then are so grieved with others because they give so very little, we wish we could compel them to give. And so we would put their cankered money into the same treasury with the bright freewill offerings of the saints, as if the Lord would receive such beggarly pittances squeezed out by force in the

same manner as He accepts the voluntary gifts of His people. It were wiser if we left those unwilling contributions to rust in the pockets of their owners, for in the long run I believe they do not help the cause, only that which is given out of a generous spirit, and out of love to Christ, will come up accepted before Him. Too readily do we get away from the free spirit when we get away from the right spirit. The fact is, the Martha spirit spoils all, because it gets us away from the inner soul of service, as I have said before, to the mere husks of service, we cease to do work as to the Lord, we labor too much for the service's sake, the main thing in our minds is the service, and not the Master, we are cumbered, and He is forgotten.

Thus have I indicated as briefly as I could, some of the weaknesses of the Martha spirit.

III. Now for THE MARY SPIRIT.

I have to show you that it is capable of producing the noblest form of consecration to Christ. Its noblest results will not come just yet. Martha's fruits ripen very quickly, Mary's take time. When Lazarus was dead, you will remember Martha ran to meet Christ, but Mary sat still in the house; Martha wanted her own time, Mary could take Christ's time. So after a while, just before our Lord's death, we find that Mary did a grand action, she did what Martha never thought of doing, she brought forth a box of precious ointment and poured it on the Lord's head, and anointed Him with ointment. While she was sitting at Christ's feet, she was forming and filling the springs of action.

You are not losing time while you are feeding the soul. While by contemplation you are getting purpose strengthened and motive purified, you are rightly using time. When the man becomes intense, when he gets within him principles vital, fervent, energetic, then when the season for work comes he will work with a power and a result which empty people can never attain however busy they may be. If the stream flows at once, as soon as ever there is a shower, it must be little better than a trickling rivulet, but if the current stream is dammed up, so that for a while nothing pours down the river bed, you will in due time, when the waters have gathered strength, witness a torrent before which nothing can stand.

Mary was filling up the fountainhead, she was listening and learning, feeding, edifying, loving, and growing strong. The engine of her soul was getting its steam ready, and when all was right her action was prompt and forcible. Meanwhile, *the manner of her action was being refined*. Martha's actions were good, but, if I may use the word, they were commonplace, she must make a great feed for the Lord Jesus, just as for any earthly friend, the spiritual nature of Christ she had forgotten, she was providing nothing for it, but Mary's estimate of Christ was of a truer order, she looked at Him as a priest, she viewed Him as a prophet, she adored Him as a king, and she had heard Him speak about dying, and had listened to His testimony about suffering, and dimly guessing what it meant, she prepared the precious spikenard that ere the dying should come she might anoint Him. The woman's deed was full of meaning and of instruction, it was indeed an embodied poem, the odor that filled the house was the perfume of love and elevated thought. She became refined in her actions by the process of musing and learning. Those who think not, who meditate not, who commune not with Christ, will do commonplace things very well, but they will never rise to the majesty of a spiritual conception, or carry out a heart suggested work for Christ.

That sitting of Mary was also *creating originality of act*. I tried two Sabbaths ago to enforce upon you the duty of originality of service as the right thing, that as we wandered everyone in his own way we should each serve God in his own way, according to our peculiar adaptation and circumstances. Now this blessed woman did so. Martha is in a hurry to be doing something—she does what any other admirer of Jesus would do, she prepares meat and a festival, but Mary does what but one or two besides herself would think of, she anoints Him, and is honored in the deed. She struck out a spark of light from herself as her own thought, and she cherished that spark till it became a flaming act. I would that in the church of God we had many sisters at Jesus' feet who at last would start up under an inspiration and say, "I have thought of something that will bring glory to God which the church has not heard of before, and this will I put into practice, that there may be a fresh gem in my Redeemer's crown."

This sitting at the Master's feet guaranteed *the real spirituality of what she did*. Did you notice when I read what the Master said concerning the pouring of the ointment upon Him, "She *has kept* this for my burial"? He praised her for keeping it, as well as for giving it, I suppose that for months she had set apart that particular ointment, and held it in reserve. Much of the sweetest aroma of a holy work lies in its being thought over and brought out with deliberation. There are works to be done at once and straightway, but there are some other works to be weighed and considered. What shall I do my Savior to praise? There is a cherished scheme, there is a plan, the details of which shall be prayed out, and every single part of it sculptured in the imagination and realized in the heart, and then the soul shall wait, delighting herself in prospect of the deed, until the dear purpose may be translated into fact. It is well to wait, expectantly saying, "Yes, the set time will come, I shall be able to do the deed, I shall not go down to my grave altogether without having been serviceable, it is not yet the time, it is not yet the appropriate season, and I am not quite ready for it myself, but I will add grace to grace and virtue to virtue, and I will add self-denial to self-denial, till I am fit to accomplish the one chosen work."

So the Savior praised Mary that she had kept this, kept it till the fit moment came before His burial, and then, but not till then, she had poured out and revealed her love. Ay, it is not your thoughtless service, performed while your souls are half asleep, it is that which you do for Christ with eyes that overflow, with hearts that swell with emotion, it is this that Jesus accepts. May we have more of such service, as we shall have if we have more of sitting at His feet. Christ accepted her, He said she had chosen the good part which should not be taken from her, and if our work be spiritual, intense, fervent, thoughtful, if it spring out of fellowship, if it is the outgushing of deep principles, of inward beliefs, of solemn gratitude, then our piety shall never be taken from us, it will be an enduring thing, and not like the mere activities of Martha, things that come and go.

I have thus wrought out my text. I shall utter but two or three words upon the general applications of it. I shall apply it to three or four things very briefly.

Brethren, I believe in our Nonconformity, I believe if ever England wanted Nonconformists it is now, but there is a tendency to make Nonconformity become a thing of externals, dealing with state and church and politics. The political relations of Nonconformists, I believe in their value, I would not have a man less earnest upon them, but I am always fearful lest we should forget that Nonconformity is nothing if it be not spiritual, and that the moment we, as Dissenters, become merely political or formal, it is all over with us.

Our strength is at the Master's feet, and I am afraid for our Nonconformity if it lives elsewhere. I mark so much conformity to the world, so much laxity of rule, so much love of novel opinions, that I tremble. I would we could go back to Puritanism. We are getting too lax, there is too much worldliness and carnality among us. There is little fear of our being censured, even by the world, for being too particular, I am afraid we are too much like the world for the world to hate us. As I pray that Nonconformity may always prevail in England, so I earnestly pray that she may stand because she abides near to Christ, holds His truth, prizes His Word, and lives upon Himself.

Now the like is true of *missions*. Apply the principle there. God bless missions, our prayer goes up for them as warmly as for our soul's salvation. When shall the utmost ends of the earth behold the salvation of our God! But the strength of missions must lie not so much in arrangements, in committees, in money, in men, as in waiting upon the Christ of God. We shall not do any more with a hundred thousand pounds, than with a single thousand, unless we get more grace, we shall not have more souls won with fifty missionaries than with five, unless we get ten times the amount of power from the right hand of the Most High. The waking up in missions needs to begin in our prayer meetings, and in our churches, in our personal wrestlings with God for the conversion of the heathen must lie the main strength of the workers that go out to do the deed. Let us remember this, Mary shall yet pour the box of ointment upon the head of the Anointed, Martha cannot do it.

The same thing is true in *revivals*. Persons will talk about getting up a revival—of all things I do believe one of the most detestable of transactions. "If you want a revival of religion," it is said, "you

must get Mr. So-and-so to preach”—with him I suppose is the residue of the Spirit. Oh, but if you want a revival, you must adopt the methods so long in vogue, and so well known as connected with such-and-such a revival! I suppose the Spirit of God is no more a free Spirit, then, as He used to be in the olden times, and whereas of old He breathed where He pleased, you fancy your methods and plans can control Him. It is not so, it is not so in any degree. The way to get the revival is to begin at the Master’s feet, you must go there with Mary and afterwards you may work with Martha. When every Christian’s heart is set right by feeding on Christ’s Word, and drinking in Christ’s Spirit, then will the revival come.

When we had the long drought, some farmers watered their grass, but found it did but very little good. An Irish gentleman remarked in my hearing that he had always noticed that when it rained there were clouds about, and so all the air was in right order for the descent of rain. We have noticed the same, and it so happens that the clouds and general constitution of the atmosphere have much to do with the value of moisture for the herbs. It is no good watering them in the sun, the circumstances do not benefit them. So with revivals. Certain things done under certain circumstances become abundantly useful, but if you have not similar circumstances, you may use the same machinery, but mischief instead of good will follow. Begin yourself with the Master, and then go outward to His service, but plans of action must be secondary.

So too, lastly, if you *want to serve God*, as I trust you do, I charge you first be careful of your own souls, do not begin with learning how to preach, or how to teach, or how to do this and that, dear friend, get the strength within your own soul, and then even if you do not know how to use it scientifically, yet you will do much. The first thing is, get the heart warmed, stir up your manhood, brace up all your faculties, get the Christ within you, ask the everlasting God to come upon you, get Him to inspire you, and then if your methods should not be according to the methods of others it will not matter, or if they should, neither will it be of consequence, having the power you will accomplish the results. But if you go about to perform the work before you have the strength from on high, you shall utterly fail. Better things we hope of you. God send them. Amen.

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