

Faithful in a Few Things

***“Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”
—Matthew 25:21***

THE WORDS OF OUR opening text, spoken by Jesus in his parable of the talents, indicate that God has not made the requirements for our faithfulness unreasonable nor unattainable. He has asked that we be faithful in “a few things.” Yet, in these few things, he expects our utmost diligence and zeal,

even unto death.

We have chosen for consideration four instances in the Scriptures where the importance of “one thing” is stressed as essential to a walk of full devotion to God. Certainly all of these are important to us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, and constitute a portion of the “few things” in which the Heavenly Father requires our faithfulness.

(1) In Psalm 27:4 David wrote, “One thing have I desired.” This one thing was to dwell in the house of the Lord and to “enquire in his temple.” Here we have the thought of meditation, as in the case of

an Israelite approaching the tabernacle and high priest for cleansing.

(2) Jesus said to the rich young man, “One thing thou lackest.” (Mark 10:21) The man with riches found renunciation of them too difficult, fitly representing those who discern what is required in full devotion to God, but who fail to take action and enter into God’s tabernacle.

(3) To Martha, Jesus said, “One thing is needful.” (Luke 10:42) Mary chose that one thing, which was to become better acquainted with her Lord and his teachings. This aptly corresponds to those who dwell inside the holy of the tabernacle, feasting upon the shewbread, enjoying the light from the golden candlestick, and offering incense of devotion and prayer upon the golden altar.

(4) Paul wrote, “This one thing I do.” (Phil. 3:13,14) Paul was determined that nothing would deter him from his course of faithfulness, and thereby attaining the “mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,” and of symbolically entering beyond the veil into the most holy.

In David we see the desire to meditate upon God and know of his plans and purposes. In the case of the wealthy young man who inquired of Jesus concerning eternal life, there was the lack of consecration. With Mary, there was contentment and satisfaction in continually learning from the Master, and in the Apostle Paul, we find full determination and endurance in the work of the Lord. Thus, four important steps in our walk of faith are revealed.

In each instance the “one thing” requires singleness of purpose and full attention. Such diligence provides a solid foundation for success, because one’s

energies are thus centered on a specific objective, affording a clear vision of the particular goal in view, and the requirements and process for attaining that goal.

In the Christian's life, where the goal is centered in following after Jesus, its fruitage is born in clearness of truth and holiness of life and walk. The Scriptures thus testify: "If any man will do [God's] will, he shall know of the doctrine." "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."—John 7:17; 8:32; I John 3:3

God's Word is life-giving and powerful, "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Heb. 4:12) To read the Scriptures and seek to understand the principles of truth contained therein provides invaluable guidance to the human heart, and thus assists the reasoning faculties in arriving at a correct understanding of one's relationship to God.

The all-encompassing nature of the ransom sacrifice of Jesus is the "wheel-hub" from which all the other spokes of Bible teachings originate. (I Tim. 2:3-6) All who truly appreciate this revelation from God's Word will adjust their habits and way of life thereto. By its influence in the mind and heart, all such will be drawn ever closer in character to that of the Master, who said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."—John 6:63

The Word of God and the Spirit of truth will always be the sources of light and life to mankind, and the

natural inclination of thought of perfected man in ages to come. The Scriptures testify: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” “The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”—Ps. 119:105; Prov. 4:18

DAVID’S DESIRE

This was David’s longing aspiration and goal. “One thing, have I asked of Jehovah, That, will I seek to secure,—That I may dwell in the house of Jehovah, all the days of my life, To view the delightfulness of Jehovah, And to contemplate in his temple.” (Ps. 27:4, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) To contemplate is to consider studiously, to meditate, and to give time and attention. It also is forward-looking, with an urgency of heart for some desired objective.

Surely David’s longing should also be our desire. It should be constantly with us, as an urgent yearning to know God more fully, and to enjoy his favor and blessing in unbroken communion. To realize such closeness to our Creator is an honored privilege, but it is not without responsibility on our part. Jesus said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”—John 14:23

Our spiritual life has first to do with our heart and faith, our inner desires and affections. We note these words from the psalmist, the Apostle Paul, and our Lord Jesus: “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD.” “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”—Ps. 84:2; Rom. 10:10; Matt. 5:6

DAVID'S OBJECTIVE

Let us notice the great objective of the “one thing” David desired. It was to “behold the beauty of the LORD,” or “the delightfulness of Jehovah,” as *Rotherham* translates it. God’s dealings with David hitherto had revealed in measure his divine attributes of wisdom, justice, love and power. These drew from David adoration, worship, and praise. He desired to inquire and contemplate further concerning these things, so that he might gain a fuller understanding of God’s requirements from man in worship, obedience, and heart submission.

Likewise, we are privileged to inquire of God and contemplate him through his Word. By the revealing power of his Holy Spirit we meditate upon and cultivate the thoughts and purposes of God toward us and all mankind. How wonderful is the power of thought and meditation. All things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy, Paul says, we may gladly think and meditate upon, “and the God of peace shall be with you.”—Phil. 4:8,9

We read in Malachi 3:16,17, “They that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, ... and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” To think “upon his name” and thus behold the delightfulness of Jehovah is most assuredly a lofty aspiration and a worthy quest.

With Israel the Tabernacle was the meeting place between themselves and God. A devout Israelite would

always be in contemplation of his God. The Law of God would be his constant meditation. It was to be as “frontlets” between his eyes. He was to talk of it by the wayside, and in the house, and to his children, when lying down and rising up, lest he forget the Lord.—Deut. 6:6-9,12

For the child of God, any location, at any time, and under any circumstance, can be an occasion for meditation and contemplation of the beauty of God. Quoting again from the Psalms: “I will meditate on thy precepts, and fix my eyes on thy ways. I will delight in thy statutes; I will not forget thy word.” “I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in thy words. My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate upon thy promise.”—Ps. 119:15,16,147,148, *Revised Standard Version*

“ONE THING” LACKING

“One thing thou lackest,” Jesus said to the rich young man. (Mark 10:21) This encounter took place after the incident of Jesus blessing the children. He had gone on his way, when “there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (vs. 17) Doubtless the young man came with an earnest desire to inherit life, but, as we will note, he had certain reservations.

How often it is the holding to some cherished desire which prevents one from enjoying the sweetness and restfulness of a decision to fully dedicate himself to do the Lord’s will. This young man’s question, “What shall I do?” was natural. It is the first thought, and a proper one, that occurs to most people when the mind and heart turn to the Lord and righteousness.

To the young man, Jesus quoted from the commandments, "Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother." The young man answered, "All these have I observed from my youth." Jesus looked upon him and in love said, "One thing thou lackest." Then, providing a test, he instructed the young man, "Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me."—vss. 19-21

When the young man heard this he "went away grieved for he had great possessions." (vs. 22) The one thing he lacked was a full resignation of himself, and all that he had, to engage in the Lord's service and the doing of his will. Jesus could not call him a disciple until he had secured from the young man his full devotion. Thus, the result of the test was evident. The young man left in sorrow. How true it is that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."—Rom. 14:17

It might have been hoped that Jesus' lofty counsel would have aroused the young man to devotion and sacrifice, but the test required more than he was prepared to give. To the young man, it was not what he expected, and a thousand times harder than keeping the commandments of the Mosaic Law as he had been careful to observe and do.

The rich young man had a desire to "inherit eternal life," but thought he could do so while still maintaining control over his possessions. Full consecration to God of one's will, heart, mind, along with all earthly hopes and possessions, is the only acceptable method

by which anyone can attain eternal life. Jesus said in another place, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.” It remains what it was, just a corn of wheat, “but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be.”—John 12:24-26

This “one thing,” wholeheartedness in consecration, will, in the age to come, also need to be taken into account with all who anticipate everlasting life. It will always be the first rule of life. “Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. ... this do, and thou shalt live.”—Luke 10:27,28

“THAT GOOD PART”

“One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:42) Whatever may be said of the contrast between these two women, Martha certainly shared the virtue of her sister Mary, as evidenced by the fact of her loving desire to serve even the temporal needs and refreshments of her Master. It was merely that she failed, perhaps only momentarily, to rise to such a high appreciation of the nature and dignity of their illustrious friend. Instead, she busied herself with the practical cares of life to such an extent that Jesus considered it excessive.

Martha, anxious for the comfort of her guest, was absorbed in every detail of hospitality to please, while Mary sat at the feet of Jesus to listen to his words

of counsel and love. She had made the better choice, evidently appreciating the meaning of the Scripture: "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD."
—Deut. 8:3

The busy Martha, seeing Mary thus seemingly careless, felt an annoyance, uncharacteristic of her normal demeanor. A mere word to her sister would probably have been sufficient to secure her interest and help. Instead, Martha came rather impatiently with a complaint to the Lord. "Dost thou not care?" she said, as though Jesus had encouraged Mary to neglect duty.—Luke 10:40

Jesus replied wisely and lovingly, no doubt, indicating to Martha that his temporal needs were easily satisfied. It was better, like Mary, to choose the "one thing" needful first—supreme concern for the things of God. These things alone could not be taken away, being eternal. Mary had made this her choice. She had "chosen that good part," which could not be taken away from her.

Let us learn this lesson. Making provision for the cares of this life, though needful and commendable, comes with a test. That test is the extent to which these things become all-encompassing to us. Too much time, too much effort, to the point of anxious thoughts, might be given to these things than would please the Lord. In his sermon on the mount, the Master taught: "Do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? ... Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."—Matt. 6:31-33, *RSV*

The instructions of the Lord will be of eternal value. If our hearing and consideration of them be constrained or omitted at various times due to our being overburdened with the cares of this life, we may lose a long-lasting benefit and blessing. In the case of Mary, if she had neglected listening to Jesus just at that moment, she may never again have heard the same words of counsel and life.

Mary's attitude well represents those dwelling in the "secret place of the most High." (Ps. 91:1) This secret place is beautifully represented by the holy of the Tabernacle. Those who dwell there are pictured as feasting upon the shewbread, the Word of God and the sustaining power of life, and enjoying also the illumination from the golden candlestick, the light of the glory of God. Thus, they are enabled to offer the fragrant incense of prayer and devotion as a sweet-smelling savor to the Heavenly Father.—John 6:48,51; II Cor. 4:6; Ps. 141:2; Phil. 4:18

PAUL'S "ONE THING"

"This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:13,14) In these words, we see that one of the predominating characteristics of the Apostle Paul was determination. He was firm, resolute, and decisive. Whatever decision he made, all his energies were directed to achieve the end in view.

He explained to King Agrippa that before his conversion, as Saul of Tarsus, he persecuted the church of Christ and "punished them oft in every synagogue, ... being exceedingly mad against them." He added,

“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” (Acts 26:9-11) Thus did Paul witness against himself and his misdirected zeal and determination prior to his conversion.

Near the end of his third missionary journey, when he had planned to be at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, Paul found that in every city he visited the Holy Spirit testified that bonds and imprisonment would await him when he arrived. Yet he was determined to go, and said, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus.” —Acts 20:16,22-24

The Apostle Paul, like the rich young man, enjoyed certain possessions. Obstacles that were insurmountable for the young man were, in Paul’s case, put aside and removed for Christ. “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but [refuse], that I may win Christ, and be found in him.” —Phil. 3:8,9

Paul knew well of those things that could have been hindrances to him in the Christian way and life, but they were all disregarded for Christ. His talents, fame, possessions, social rank, and worldly reputation, had all been put away years before writing this letter to the church at Philippi. Paul had determined to do just one thing, and he was triumphant.

The Apostle’s sentiment was, “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” (vs. 11) What a wonderful example Paul has been to all those called of God to that high, holy and heavenly

calling in Christ Jesus. It is these whose longing of soul has likewise been, and still is, in zealous contemplation, resignation, satisfaction and loving devotion, with full and complete submission to do God's will as revealed in his Word.

In consecration of himself and of all human aspirations, Paul gave evidence of being completely satisfied with Jesus and his teaching. So was Mary with her Lord and Master. He is the same to all who are content with the sweet and unbroken fellowship of Christ Jesus, even though often deprived of many material comforts which might otherwise have been possessed.

Let us, brethren, be resolute and determined, steadfast and unmovable with sobriety and watchfulness, and abounding in the work of the Lord. (I Cor. 15:58) Let us be established in the faith, and in our daily walk before the Lord, maintain to the end an increasing contemplation of God, his will and his kingdom. Let us complete our submission to the divine will for us, fulfilling our renunciation of self and consecration to our Heavenly Father.

Hence, we will be completely satisfied in all things under the providence of God, making our response to his High Calling the most cherished delight of our life. May we then hear the words of our opening text: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." ■

*"Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land,
that they may dwell with me."*

—Psalm 101:6