

The Lord's Day Evening  
"One Thing Necessary"  
Luke 10:38–11:4  
Dr. Olan Stubbs  
March 13, 2016 – Evening sermon

By way of introduction we'll start by looking at a passage in Jeremiah 2 and then we'll look at primary text for this study. Jeremiah 2:11–13 says [11] *Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. [12] Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate declares the LORD, [13] for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.* I think most of us would agree that the reason God made us was to worship Him and we're to worship one thing and that is God. We are natural worshippers. To not worship is not an option. You see this theme throughout life and you certainly see it in the Bible.

Here is one story I will reference. Do you remember when the Israelites were coming out of Egypt in the Exodus? Moses was their main representative to tell them about this God Yahweh. He went up on the mountain, talked to God and received the Ten Commandments. He had been gone a long time and the Israelites felt disconnected from God. They didn't turn to Aaron and declare they wouldn't worship anything but they wanted him to make them a new god. They knew instinctively that they had to have something to worship. All people worship but the question is what do you worship.

When we think of worship it is not just us just standing here singing songs of praise. Now that is a big portion of it but part of the way it explains worship in this passage is worship includes the idea of looking to something or someone to meet your ultimate needs. In Jeremiah it says that 'My people have exchanged their glory.' So the one thing we worship in life the most is the thing we look to for a sense of significance, purpose and identity. Later God says "I'm the fountain of living waters. I'm giving them life." Think of the level you look to water for. It is life, joy, refreshment, pleasure for there is so many good things water can bring you and God says spiritually that He is Living Water. He gives life, joy, pleasure, satisfaction and refreshment. He gives all you need and more but yet My people don't look to me for this, essentially they go and try to make buckets for themselves to hold water and it never works.

Here is the question I want us to think about in this study. What is it that we tend in our own lives personally to turn away from God and look somewhere else to find our glory, our sense of significance? We do that, right? We are going to look at this passage in Luke 10. I think this is a familiar passage. There are at least two questions I want to ask. This passage is a comparison between Martha and Mary. If you read all the Scripture has to say about Martha she is presented as a true believer. She is not a pagan or worshipping some carved idol. She knows who Christ is and is born again yet she struggles to center her life around Christ.

You might be thinking you are at the best place spiritually in your life for whatever reason right now and you really do have Christ as first place in your life. I'm glad to hear that but the reality is all of us at least have something in our life that is always competing for first place with Christ in our hearts. The wise Christian will be aware of what this is in their life that tends to compete with their affections for Christ so they can be on guard against that. If this is something that is a gross outward sin like pornography you probably don't have to have a day of fasting and prayer if you're spending four hours a night looking at pornography. This idol is

obvious, like egg on your face so you need to repent but for the Sunday night crowd at Briarwood that is probably not the major sin you're struggling with.

It may be something good that we turn into an ultimate thing that we exalt to too high a place in our life. It can be a lot less clear to figure out the things you tend to idolize in your life. What are the areas of your life that you tend to look for, for your glory, your satisfaction, your joy and your pleasure other than Christ and Christ alone? I think this passage in Luke 10 gives us some helpful hints and how to discern that in our life.

Luke 10:38–11:4 says [38] *Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. [39] And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. [40] But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." [41] But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, [42] but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."*

[1] *Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." [2] And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. [3] Give us each day our daily bread, [4] and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation."*

I want us to do a little diagnosis. This is still by way of introduction but let's look at Martha. What are the telltale signs that she was off kilter in her life, that she had something else that captured the central affections of her heart? What exactly was it that Martha had given her life to? It wasn't something terrible. She wasn't a drug dealer in love with money. Jesus the traveling Prophet and Evangelist had come to town with no place to stay and she told Him to come to her house. Bring all Your disciples with you and I'll feed everyone. This was a hospitality type ministry at the least. This was a great thing. The Bible has great things to say about volunteering your time for ministry service. Hospitality is a spiritual gift. What she was doing in and of itself was a good thing and yet she gets rebuked. So let's figure out what made it sinful in the way that Martha was doing this.

Maybe a couple of cultural clues will help us understand this a little bit but most commentators would say that probably what had happened was that Mary had done some bear minimum preparation in the kitchen but then as soon as Jesus sat down to start teaching she left the kitchen and ran to sit at the Lord's feet. Whereas Martha was doing more of a Thanksgiving type feast that will have 12 different casseroles. No one will eat it but it will look really impressive. Literally these great feasts could take a whole day to prepare. She is doing a good thing trying to serve the Lord Jesus yet she gets rebuked. Are you super busy with a lot of good things where people are saying 'man that person is just serving the Lord all the time' or you are great businessman or you have high integrity or you have great character but when the Lord looks on your heart He might have a rebuke for you. So what is in this text that would help us see where we might fall off the wagon so to speak even in these good things?

The first thing it tells us about Martha is that she was distracted. Are you distracted in your life? One of the signs of an idol in your life is when you are distracted. You might think that is pretty vague and that's really not helpful. You have to be distracted from something. The most obvious thing from the text is whether you are distracted from your time with the Lord. Are you distracted from church? Are you distracted from sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to His Word? It's a great thing for us to think about.

The next thing the text tells us is that she was doing much serving. Here is what John Calvin says about this text; Martha carried her activity beyond the proper bounds. Is there anything in your life that is good and yet if you evaluate it, it is beyond the proper bounds? It is good to be physically healthy but if you think you have to spend two hours in the gym every day to feel good about your health then I think the average person would probably say that is beyond the proper bounds. You are putting too much expectation, hope and dependence on that good area and you've turned it into an ultimate thing. Where are the areas in your life where other people tend to say 'you're excessive in this or that'? It could be hobbies you have. There is nothing wrong with liking golf or hunting or kids' sports but if you're exceeding the proper boundaries then it could be wrong. It is a good thing to ask the Lord where you might have some of these in your life and for Him to convict you of them.

John MacArthur said of this text that it was like Martha was being drug all around. William Hendrickson said she was distracted and agitated. I would say she was like a chicken running around with her head cut off. Have you ever felt that way? That is what was going on with this much serving, with things being overdone. It doesn't stop there.

The next thing we see is that Martha gets angry with her sister Mary. One of the clearest ways to tell if you have an idol in your life where you turn a good thing into an ultimate thing, is when you fall into the comparison game. It is when you are constantly looking around trying to evaluate yourself in some area comparing it to others. Even when you think you are doing better it is never enough. Now you are not literally bowing down to this or praying to it or thinking if I do it I'll go to heaven but you do treat it like a pseudo-savior. You are thinking it will give you a sense of life, if I can work hard enough in this one area. So you think this will give you purpose or a sense of being somebody or feeling comfortable enough with myself. It is unending. It doesn't matter how better you do in that area for there will always be this sneaking suspicion that someone else is doing better than you. Martha is doing a comparison with Mary and she doesn't like what she is doing and gets angry with Jesus. It doesn't stop there.

Where do you tend to have the most human conflict? In my life occasionally when my wife and I have conflict it tends to have to do with our scheduling. That can be a place of disharmony in our lives and it's usually because I'm trying to pack too much into my schedule. I like to do a lot of stuff. When you find a place in your life where there is disharmony repeatedly with other people that are close to you that is usually something that is pointing to an idol in your life that you deem too important. You need to pause, evaluate and pray about it and ask the Lord to shed His light on that area in your life. What is going on there?

It doesn't stop there because Martha gets angry not just at Mary but at the Lord Jesus Christ and that's never a good thing. If you are angry at God you need to tell God. Don't try to hide it because He already knows it is there. Pray about it but it is a sin to be angry at God. Repent and as you talk with Him about it ask Him to set you free but Martha doesn't like the way things are going and she takes it to the Lord in prayer. That is the right thing to do because she will get a rebuke and she will repent and things will work out well in the long run for Martha.

If you find yourself going to God a lot saying "This isn't fair God" there is a humble way to say this. Go read the whole book of Psalms. There is a humble way to say 'I'm sad, I don't like life and please help me' that is a wonderful way to pray. There is also an arrogant way to pray and I think there is very subtle way we can think that the more we put in for God then we ought to be getting some rewards in this life. If you find yourself going to God saying you're frustrated with life's circumstances that is a sign that is an area (the area you tend to complain

about) that is an idol in your life. You are putting too much significance, too much hope for pleasure and joy in whatever it is you are complaining about.

The last thing we see is that Martha is anxious and troubled. Worry is a sin. It's almost a past time in America these days but Biblically worry, anxiety, fretting is a sin. Where do you tend to worry the most? Is it about money then you worry too much about money. Do you worry too much about your kids, then you're probably idolizing your kids. Do you fret too much about the politics in our country, if so then you probably idolize that and put too much emphasis on that in your life.

If you are clueless about what competes for your affection for the Lord Jesus Christ, then I just have a little warning for you. That is not a sign that you are so spiritually mature that you're about to get raptured out of here. That is a sign that you are so spiritually blind and hard hearted you ought to worry about your salvation. If I was in a place with my wife where there was another woman that was becoming a problem, a temptation, a competitor, I ought to know about it, right? There is not one, praise the Lord but the Bible says that until we see the Lord face to face there is sin in our lives. We need to be aware of that sin in our lives, at least what we are tempted to put before Christ. We all have something.

I know that was a long introduction but the next three points will go much quicker. You may say 'I don't want anything else in my life to be central, not even a good thing, that would become like God to me' so what do you do? This text points us to spending time with Christ which is the most important thing you can do. You probably think if Jesus showed up in His robe, beard and sandals in your kitchen then you would spend time with Christ but we know that the Bible is His Living Word. When you read it, listen to it, and study it you are spending time with Christ. We get a good example from this text when we see Mary. It doesn't give us a lot but it gives us one sentence.

Luke 20:39 says [39] *And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.* Think about Mary here. She is humble. She is sitting at His feet. She is not trying to sit on the bench beside Him like a peer listening where she may say 'That's interesting Jesus but let me share an insight with You.' There is a degree of humility to see her sitting at His feet. She is close to Him which shows a sense of devotion and adoration. She is spiritually attracted to this Man and enjoys listening to Him. She is soaking in His Word. Is that a picture of your life?

This may be the most important thing for some of you. She had to leave off her normal place in the kitchen. Life is busy and especially American culture. I like things busy. This is not a sermon about being passive or to go be a monk, live out in a cave and just read the Bible all day. That is not the picture the Bible gives us. To make sure your life is centered on Christ and Christ alone then it is very clear we have to spend time with Him every day and you have to make time to spend time with Him regularly. The time is not just going to pop up. Your priorities don't just arrange themselves all by themselves. A magical list doesn't just fall out of the sky each day to tell you what to do each day. You have to plan, purpose and be intentional.

I thought this study matter might be too basic but I am constantly shocked with how many years I have been in ministry that when I'm talking with someone who is either a new Christian or one who has been one for a long time, about a problem I will ask them "How has your time with the Lord been?" And they will say "It's been terrible." "How is your prayer life?" "I haven't prayed in days." It is easy to get away from what should be the most basic thing in our Christian life.

To me by far the most interesting thing in this passage is Jesus' commentary on the comparison. Be careful when you bring your comparison game to Jesus because you may not like the way it ends. Jesus rebukes Martha. Luke 10:41–42 says [41] *But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, [42] but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."* Do you realize what a radical summation statement that is?

He says that literally only one thing is necessary. Part of being in ministry and studying the Scripture you try to wrestle with passages like this and think of other things that are necessary. Air is necessary Jesus, what about air? Not necessarily because if you're in Christ you could suffocate and die but you will go to heaven. I'd say that worked out pretty well right? The only thing that you could say is necessary in your life is this relationship with Christ. Now you should make time in your life to breathe and there are plenty of other good things that ought to be in your life but this text is telling us to make sure you get the most important thing in first. You have to make time to spend time with Christ and generally that means you have to cut something else out to do that.

Who has tons of free time laying around? I don't think most of us are in this situation where we have too much free time. If you really want to prioritize your relationship with Christ it will be the one thing necessary. Now of course you have to cut the obvious sinful stuff out of your life to do this but there might be good things you have to cut out of your life as well to make sure this time with Him happens in your life. You may have to cut back on service at the church because you are involved with too many things at the church so that you can spend more personal time with the Lord. I don't know what you'll need to do to spend time with the Lord but know yourself so you can repent of the things where you put too much time in.

Now what should you do? You should center your life on Christ. You should cut other things out of your life to make sure there is always enough time with the Lord in your life. How do you prioritize time with Christ? The first thing you do, is listen to the Word. You read it, study it for there are many different ways to intake it but then you pray back. Let's look further in this Luke text. You might think it's odd that the Lord's Prayer follows this Martha and Mary passage.

I do want to remind you that Luke did not write chapters 9 through 13 in straight chronology. He put it together thematically. He intentionally put these two stories together. Secondly, in the original text there were no chapter divisions or verse divisions. So for Luke these two stories come together intentionally. What does it really look like to spend time with Christ when Christ isn't physically sitting in my kitchen? It has to do with the Word and prayer. So I want to make a couple of points about prayer here and this idea of prioritizing my time with Christ.

The disciples go to Jesus because they see Him pray and they say "Teach us to pray." This is very radical. These men (disciples) spent three years with Christ. Imagine if you were one of the disciples. What would have been some of the questions you would have asked Him? They asked Him a lot of questions but there is only one time that they specifically ask Him to teach them how to pray. Why is that? If you went to a professional golfer you would think one would ask him how to play golf because we tend to go to those who are experts in the area we are looking to find answers about. After months of hanging out with Jesus the disciples sense Jesus is an expert in prayer.

Do you remember where most of Jesus' disciples had come from? Some were previously disciples of John the Baptist who was no light weight spiritually. Jesus said John the

Baptist was the greatest man in the Kingdom up until now. John lives out in the wilderness and he had taught them how to pray but they turn to Jesus and say 'He's the Guy.' How often have you paused to meditate on the fact that God, the Creator of the Universe became a human man and walked around on the earth, yet He still made sure He spent lots of time alone with His Father in heaven. It's shocking! Luke 5:16 says [16] *But he (Jesus) would withdraw to desolate places and pray.* It was His habit. He would do this often. All of the Gospels gives us this picture of Christ as a Man of prayer and the disciples realize there is something different about this Man, how He prays and how often He prays. They say 'Please teach us to pray' and Jesus does. Let's look at how He says we ought to pray.

Luke 11:2 says [2] *And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come..."* When you're spending time alone with the Lord, the first place in your prayer ought to be focused on the Lord. Martin Lloyd Jones in his books on the Sermon on the Mount says "Ideally every time you pray you ought to pause a second and remember who you are praying to." Don't just rush into prayer. Always think you are talking to the God of the universe. The first little piece of your time with the Lord should be worship. I can't believe the One who knows the stars by name wants to talk to me and listen to me. He is not just God Almighty but He is God my Father. He is near unto me. He cares and listens. He has a heart. There is worship.

If you really love that God and worship this God in heaven then what should you do? You should pray about what is on His heart. That should be the primary place in your prayer life. The things you read in the Bible and the things that God cares about are the things you need to focus on and say 'I want this to happen in my life God, in my family's life, in our country.' That is another very practical way to say you prioritize Christ, not all these other things and that you pray back to Him the things in His Word.

You might think, 'can't I pray about my needs and other things?' Sure you can. Let's look further at the text. Luke 11:3 says [3] *Give us each day our daily bread.* Most of us don't literally have to pray for bread because we have plenty in the cupboard. Jesus is saying you can pray for the smallest, seemingly most insignificant thing in your life so if it is important to you then pray about it. I have been teaching for years about the importance of spending time alone with the Lord every single day and I many times in the past I would say 'this is a great idea' but there is not a single verse that actually commands that. I try not to say something authoritative unless it is said in the Bible and I'm sure I don't do that perfectly but I at least try to but when I started meditating on Luke 11:3.

The implication in Luke 11:3 is that you eat every day so then God give me everything I need to today. It is good to spend time with the Lord every single day in prayer and the Word. How much time? That is something you have to figure out between you and the Lord but I'm just trying to get the first point down which is the one thing necessary is that you make time. You cut other things out of your life so that you have time every single day to be in the Word and prayer. In all my years of ministry and the different discussions I have had with people when someone has a problem, ninety percent of my experience the major thing they could do that would help that problem is spending more or better time with the Lord. That is not always the answer but many times it is. Does it fix everything? No, but it fixes a lot for it is the one thing necessary which is what Jesus said. It sounds pretty important to me.

Lastly, I want to give you the why. Why should we do this? There are many reasons but I want to give you one from the text. Luke 11:4 says [4] *and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.* Why is it that

I should center my life in Christ? Why should I spend time with Christ every day? Christ is the only God out there that can give you real forgiveness. Whatever false gods, so to speak, that you set your expectations on, when you fail it won't be merciful.

Tim Keller said when he was planting his church in New York City and he would get stressed out he was one day meditating on Romans 1:16, 17 which says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* He said "We're Presbyterians and we don't really believe God speaks to us anymore but there was a voice in my head that said 'and those that live by preaching will die a slow death every Sunday night.'"

Only someone with his authority can get away with saying that but whatever it is that you say 'if I can just do this right I'll have glory, purpose, and joy' it will never be enough. It wasn't enough for Martha and it won't be for you. When you fail your god, so to speak, where your business doesn't go as well as you wanted it to or whatever it is, there is no mercy from these false gods. Part of what is so beautiful about worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ and saying you will center your life on Him, is that you know you are going to fail. You know you will not perfectly spend time alone with the Lord or perfectly arrange your priorities but with Christ there is always a place for mercy. This is a God who hears you when you say "Please forgive me" and He will. This is not to be taken in the idea of abusing grace but it's forgive me as I forgive others and protect me by not leading me not into temptation. Please help me not do it again but forgive me.

The disciples had to take a lot of courage from that and be super motivated. They turned into men of prayer, not Judas Iscariot, but the others. In Acts 6 when the mercy ministry needs were huge they said 'we can't do that so we'll appoint some deacons so we can stay devoted to the Word and prayer.' I paraphrased it but they kept their devotion. They didn't let other things cut in on that time. They learned the lesson.

Here is the thing we can see that they couldn't see in Luke 10 and 11. They could take it on faith for they could pray for forgiveness and they would get it. We have something even clearer because we can go to Him and say "Lord, I failed you again. I didn't want to but I did. I didn't prioritize You, please forgive me" and for us there can be a real sense of cleansing and worship because we know that this same Lord who was our Model is also our Savior. He took the wrath that all of us deserved and rose again. What the Gospel ought to do is that the more we meditate on it is that we can't believe this God would love us for He knows how much we sin and yet every single day He will keep forgiving me. The whole manner of love should make us say 'where else would I want to center my life? Where else would I want to look for a sense of glory and joy?' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I pray for every one reading this for we are at different place of maturity, we have different idols and You know them better than we know ourselves. I pray there would be conviction of the things in our life that are too important to us and I would pray there would be the honest humility to repent but then I pray that You would give us wisdom on how to prioritize our time better, how to cut other things out to make time alone with You and that we would not just go through the motions but let our hearts go to the Word to hear of Your love, to see the glory of Christ, to pray to You, to worship You, to pray things on Your heart and ours but let us

always never grow tired of boasting in the cross of Christ and the mercy we have there. We're so thankful that You are a merciful Savior and we pray all this in Christ's Name, Amen.