

The One Thing

Today In Your Reading...

We have been in the New Testament now for three weeks. While it is refreshing to be reading the stories and teachings of Jesus, it has been a challenge to know exactly where to focus. Today is no exception. We encountered a variety of conversations and events, and it is difficult to know how to summarize them in a devotion.

Having said that, I believe that Jesus' words to Martha cut to the core of all that we read today. "My dear Martha," He said, "you are so upset over all these details! **There is really only one thing worth being concerned about.** Mary has discovered it..." (*Luke 10:41, 42*). Mary's sister, Martha, being a good host to her special guests, was caught up in all of the preparations. While she had good intentions and was involved in good things, they were distracting her from what was most important. The Messiah was in her house yet she was consumed with the meal.

As Jesus spoke to the people at the Temple about "the truth that would set them free," they were more consumed with their ancestry. "But we are descendants of Abraham," they said. "We have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean 'set free'?" (*John 8:31-36*). This statement would be similar to a citizen of the United States saying, "But we are Americans; we have never been conquered by anyone. Why do we need to be set free?" What the Jews did not understand was that they were slaves to sin, and that Jesus was there to deliver them from their bondage to it. Their pedigree was more important than their souls.

Followers of Christ can also get distracted from the most important thing. When the 72 disciples returned to report to Jesus of their successes, Jesus replied, "Don't rejoice just because evil spirits obey you. Rejoice because you are registered as citizens of heaven" (*Luke 10:20*).

Daily Reflection

Summarize "the one thing." What exactly is to be your focus in life?

Satan is the great deceiver; he is also the great distracter. He wants you to think that there are more important things to be concerned about. He wants to keep you in a fog, wandering in the sea, so that you will lose sight of the lighthouse.

With what distractions has Satan filled your life, to keep you from focusing on "the one thing"?

Life is busy. There are so many things to be done each day. How, then, are you supposed to stay focused on "the one thing" in the midst of all that is "necessary"? How do you discern what deserves your time and what must be cut out?

No Dark Corners

October 16 — *Luke 11:14-12:34*

Day 289 — 76 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Jesus was teaching and performing miracles in the midst of a crowd. Many people claimed that He was casting out demons by the power of Satan; and, others pleaded for a sign from heaven to prove that Jesus was the Son of God. Evidently, what Jesus had already done in their midst was not proof enough; what they needed was not more signs but to open their eyes and believe what they were already seeing. Then, there were the Pharisees and other religious leaders who were trying to catch Jesus in a trap because of something He said or did.

This type of hostile environment was typical of Jesus' ministry and He did not back down from it. Instead, He pointed out the unreasonableness of their claims, their hard-heartedness in regards to past prophets and messengers from God, and their religious charade. While they appeared to be pious, they were only playing the game, going through the motions, saying and doing that which made them look good. "Beware of their hypocrisy," Jesus said (*Luke 12:1*).

Jesus also made this pointed statement, "Your eye is a lamp for your body. A pure eye lets sunshine into your soul, but an evil eye shuts out the light and plunges you into darkness. Make sure the light that you think you have is not really darkness. **If you are filled with light, with no dark corners, then your whole life will be radiant**, as though a floodlight is shining on you" (*11:33-36*).

Those who were listening to Jesus could apply His teaching in two ways. First, those who were unbelievers had Christ, the Light, standing before them, but their evil eye (hardened heart) shut Him out and plunged them into darkness. The Pharisees, also, while thinking that they already had "spiritual light" really had darkness. Their man-made religion made them look good

on the outside, but they were hypocrites. They were religious for show, not because they were truly seeking to please God. Their supposed wisdom kept them from believing in Christ.

However, for those who believe in Christ and who open their eyes to His light, we will be flooded with spiritual illumination. Just as we would physically bask in the glow of a floodlight, in Christ our inward spiritual life is enlightened by His presence. To the extent that we surrender every area of our lives to Christ, to that extent **there are "no dark corners,"** and our whole life is filled with His radiance.

Daily Reflection

Define the meaning of "dark corners." What do those look like, in regards to Christ?

How would this idea of "dark corners" relate to one's money, for example in the story that Jesus told of the rich fool?

Describe your life. Is every area filled with radiance or do you have "dark corners"?

Blind and Barren

Today In Your Reading...

Jesus used an illustration to describe the unbelief of the Jews. "A man (God) planted a fig tree in his garden and came again and again to see if there was any fruit on it, but he was always disappointed. Finally, he said to his gardener, 'I've waited three years and there hasn't been a single fig! Cut it down! It's taking up space we can use for something else'" (*Luke 13:6-9*).

Jesus went on to say that the gardener (Jesus) answered, "Give it one more chance. Leave it another year... If we get figs next year, fine. If not, you can cut it down." Here is a prophecy of Jerusalem's rejection of Christ and ultimate destruction by the Romans. Jesus had spent three years teaching, healing, and sharing His message of salvation. It wouldn't have mattered if Jesus would have stayed thirty years; the Jews were not going to change. Instead, they refused to believe and receive Him, and, thus, they bore no fruit. God would, indeed, cut them down and give time for the Gentile nations to respond.

This hard-hearted rejection of Christ was further illustrated in the response of the religious leaders when Jesus healed a man born blind (*John 9:1-41*). Their contention was, of course, that Jesus healed him on the Sabbath, a violation of the law of Moses. The law was never intended to prevent someone from extending mercy to someone else. Here again is an example of the Jews following the letter of the law to the point that helping others was a "sin."

The blind man and his parents gave an extraordinary testimony of what happened, but the Pharisees refused to believe it. "I know this," he said, "**I once was blind and now I see.**" But, it wasn't enough for these callous men to forfeit their pride. Though they saw an uncommon miracle, they chose to remain in their blindness.

Daily Reflection

Several points of application are obvious here. First, the blind man gives us an example of personal testimony. Sometimes we think that we must know all of the answers before we can share the gospel with others. Not true. **All we have to do is tell our story**, what Christ has done in our lives. Just say, "I once was blind and now I see" and let God do the rest.

Second, even with truth on our side and a logical defense of our faith, **some people will never believe**. They may be very smart, even "religious," and, yet, they will reject the evidence before them, because it means that they must surrender their pride. Though they can see, they choose to remain blind.

Third, **true disciples of Christ bear fruit**. Though some people may claim to be Christian or they may seem to be religious — they go to church, read their Bible, or say all of the right things — they have no fruit in their lives to support their claim. In the end, many will say to God, "Lord, Lord, we did all these things in your name"; but He will say, "Get away from Me, for I never knew you" (*Matthew 7:23*).

Are you bearing genuine Christ-like fruit in your life, or are you a barren tree claiming to be a follower of God? How can you tell?

Have you been playing the religious "game" when you have really been blind to the Gospel?
Pray that the Lord will open your eyes!

The Only Door

October 18 — *John 10:1-42; Luke 13:22-14:24*

Day 291 — 74 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We encountered one of the most controversial doctrines of Christianity, that of **the exclusivity of Christ**. Several times throughout His ministry, Jesus said of Himself that He was the only way to be saved from sin, that there is salvation in no one but Him. For example, He said, "I am the gate for the sheep... Those who come through Me will be saved" (*John 10:7, 9; 14:6*).

It is with this exclusivity that many people balk, claiming that it is unfair, narrow-minded, and bigoted. Our society's love affair with tolerance, religious pluralism, and co-existence contradicts Jesus' claims. The world would rather believe that Jesus is one way among many paths to God. It is prideful and selfish, it says, to claim that any one way is right and the others are wrong, that this is not loving at all.

These excuses are simply smokescreens laid down by the enemy, to keep people in a fog of confusion. The truth is that Christianity is not alone in its exclusive claims. **Every religion is exclusive of the others**, meaning that every religion has its prescribed means to salvation. The enemy only wants us to believe that it is Christianity that is narrow-minded.

The reality of modern *tolerance* (all religions are valid), *pluralism* (there are many paths to God) and *co-existence* (why do we need to choose one over the other) is that **all religions cannot be right**. Some religions claim Jesus was only a man, others a prophet, and still others a devil. But Jesus said of Himself that He was the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and the only way to have right standing before God. How, then, can they all be right?

So then, what are Jesus' credentials? Why does He claim that He is the only way to have salvation? He is the only person to have lived a

sinless life; and, He is the only person who not only "laid down His life for the sheep but who took it up again." Everyone else who comes at the sheep "sneaks over the wall of the sheepfold." They are thieves and robbers who come only to steal, kill, and destroy. "The Shepherd came to give life and to give it in all its fullness." Furthermore, **every other religion in the world is works-based**, men trying to achieve perfection their own way, which is impossible since they are fallen and corrupt. Christ is the only one to offer salvation as a free gift of God because of His sacrifice on our behalf.

Daily Reflection

If man could achieve his own salvation, what would be the ramifications?

How would you refute the idea that the exclusivity of Christianity is unloving?

If Christ is the only way to be saved from sin, then what should that motivate you to do?

What Is Most Valuable?

Today In Your Reading...

Jesus described what it meant to be one of His followers. "If you want to be My follower," He said, "then you must love Me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, more than your own life. Otherwise, one cannot be My disciple; and, you cannot be My disciple if you do not carry your own cross and follow Me" (*Luke 14:25-27*). In other words, **Christ must take first place in our lives** and *those things that He values must supersede the things that we value.*

For example, we value money. It might be the one thing that the world honors most. However, "what the world honors is an abomination in the sight of God," because it distracts men from following Him (*16:13-15*). "You cannot serve both God and money," Jesus said, "for you will hate the one and love the other or you will be devoted to one and despise the other." In God's view, *money has no value, unless it is used for His purposes, to benefit others.*

What the Lord values is lost souls. When tax collectors and other notorious sinners complained about the people with whom Jesus was associating, He told three stories, that of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (*15:1-32*). "Heaven is happy over one lost sinner who returns to God... There is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents... We should celebrate when one who was lost is found." Here is what God values.

Those who are lost in their sins are separated from fellowship with God. There is a great chasm between them, as Jesus illustrated in His story of the rich man and Lazarus (*16:19-31*). Those who are lost end up in a place of anguish, suffering for eternity. Jesus said that He came "to seek and save the lost" (*Luke 19:10*). **Shouldn't this be what His followers value?**

Daily Reflection

What are those things that you value most?

How do they compare with your commitment to Christ? Have you chosen them over Him or has your love for Him eclipsed your view of them?

The world wants you to value what it values. Have you been deceived into cherishing what it says is valuable? Where in your life can you see the loves of the world creeping in and taking precedence over what is most important?

So is the Lord saying that you cannot love your family, your friends, or even yourself? Explain.

If the Lord values the rebel, the sinner, the heathen, the backslider, the down and out, the losers of society, then shouldn't His followers do the same? Evaluate your view of those the world has relegated to the sidelines. **Are you seeing them with your eyes or His?**

The Resurrection and the Life BiAY.org | Daily Reflections

October 20 — *John 11:38-57; Luke 17:11-18:8*

Day 293 — 72 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

At the end of yesterday's passage, we read about the death of Lazarus. Jesus said to His disciples, "For your sake, I am glad that I wasn't there, because this will give you another opportunity to believe in Me" (*John 11:14, 15*). When Jesus met Martha, Lazarus' sister, on the way to Bethany, He told her, "Your brother will rise again." She responded that she understood that he would rise again with everyone else on resurrection day. Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life.** Those who believe in Me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life and will never perish" (*v.22-26*).

In today's passage, Jesus performed the greatest miracle so far in His ministry, at least in the minds of the people watching. He raised a man who had been dead for four days. Jesus did, indeed, prove that He was (and is) "the resurrection and the life." Jesus, who was God in the flesh, has the power over the most feared human enemy — physical death. But **in His demonstration of power over physical death, He was also expressing His power over spiritual death.**

Not only can Jesus resurrect us from the dead, He can give us everlasting life. In a conversation that He had later with the Pharisees, Jesus discussed His return. "When the Son of Man returns, you will know it beyond all doubt. It will be as evident as the lightning that flashes across the sky... Two people will be grinding flour together at the mill; one will be taken, the other left" (*17:24, 35*).

Who are these people who vanish and where do they go? Paul gives us more detail in a letter he wrote to the Thessalonians. "Dear brothers, we want you to know what will happen to believers who have died, so you will not grieve like people

who have no hope... When Jesus returns, God will bring back with Him the believers who have died. We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet Him ahead of those who have died. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout... First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves (**resurrection**). Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever (**life**)" (*1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*).

Daily Reflection

Paul ended this message to the Thessalonians by telling them to "encourage one another with these words." Do you find encouragement with the words of Jesus and Paul? Why or why not?

After Jesus raised Lazarus, John continued the story by saying, "Many of the people who were there believed in Jesus when they saw this happen, but some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. They responded, 'If we leave Him alone, the whole nation will follow Him, and then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation.' One of them, named Caiaphas, said, 'Why should the whole nation be destroyed? Let this one man die for the people'" (*11:45-52*).

Once again, we see the polarizing effect that Jesus has on people. They are either for Him or against Him. Little did Caiaphas know that he was foreshadowing Jesus' sacrificial death.

No One Good But God

Today In Your Reading...

Although we read about various conversations that Jesus had, they are all tied together with a theme — **salvation is not gotten but given**. This theme is most recognizable in the question posed to Jesus by the rich man, "Good Teacher, what should I do to get eternal life?" (*Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18*). Matthew records the man asking this question another way, "What good things must I do to have eternal life?" (*19:16*).

Jesus' response is instructive for us in regards to our own salvation but also in how we share the gospel with others. Notice what He does. First, He said, "Why do you call Me good? Only God is good." Jesus is not denying His deity with this statement, but rather He is bringing to the man's attention the fact that **other than God, no one on earth is good**. All men are sinful; they have fallen short of God's glory and goodness (*Romans 3:23*).

Jesus, then, proceeded to demonstrate this truth by rolling out the Ten Commandments, by comparing the man's life to the moral standards of God. The arrogant man told Jesus that He had kept all of the commandments. In other words, he told Jesus that he was a good person. In his pride, he did not recognize his sin. When Jesus told him to sell all of his possessions, give them to the poor, and follow Him, his countenance fell and he walked away. He realized that he had broken the first two commandments. He had replaced God with money, and he had arranged his life in such a way as to worship that god.

Note that by breaking the first two commandments, the man had lied about keeping all of the commandments, another strike against him. "For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws" (*James 2:10*). The bottom line is that, in his fallen state, *not one person can jus-*

tify himself before God. Therefore, **salvation is out of our reach**.

This same theme now can be applied to the other conversations Jesus had. For example, the Pharisee prayed, "Thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else" (*Luke 18:12*), but the tax collector prayed, "O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner" (v.13). He recognized and repented of his sin and, therefore, Jesus said that he was justified before God.

In regards to divorce, Jesus pointed out that sinful men cannot keep God's standards for marriage, to remain faithful to one person for life (*Mark 10:1-12*). When Jesus spoke about children, He said, in essence, that salvation is not given to the perfect or the proud, but rather it is given to those with faith. "Anyone who does not have their kind of faith will never get into the Kingdom of God" (*Luke 18:17*). Even that saving faith is not natural to us; it is given to us supernaturally by God (*Ephesians 2:8, 9*).

Daily Reflection

What exactly do the Commandments do, then, in regards to the process of salvation? Why are they necessary for conversion to be genuine?

Before God's standard of holiness, we are all condemned, even you. We cannot take pride in any actions or achievements, so far as to justify ourselves in His sight. We can place no hope in ourselves as having any righteousness of our own to boast. But, here's the good news, **"What is impossible from a human perspective is possible with God"** (*Luke 18:27*).