

~Other Speakers A-F: Samuel Davies:**The One Thing Needful****by Samuel Davies**

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:41-42

For what are we placed in this world? Is it to dwell here always? You cannot think so, when the millions of mankind that have appeared upon the stage of time, are so many instances of the contrary. The true notion therefore of the present state is, that it is a state of preparation and trial for the eternal world; a state of education for our adult age. As children are sent to school, and youth bound out to trades, to prepare them for business, and qualify them to live in the world—so we are placed here to prepare us for the grand business of immortality, the state of our maturity, and to qualify us to live forever!

And is there a heaven of the most perfect happiness, and a hell of the most intense misery—just before us, perhaps not a year or even a day distant from us? And it is the great design, the business and duty of the present state: to obtain the one and escape the other! Then what are we doing? What is the world doing all around us? Are they acting as it befits candidates for eternity? Are they indeed making that the principal object of their most zealous endeavors, which is the grand design, business and duty of the present state? Are they minding this at all hazards, whatever else they neglect?

This is what we might expect from them as reasonable creatures who love themselves, and have a strong innate desire of happiness. This, a stranger to our world might charitably presume concerning them. But, alas! look upon the conduct of the world around you, or look nearer home, and where you are more nearly interested, upon your own conduct—and you will see this is not generally the case! No! instead of pursuing the one thing needful, the world is all in motion, all hustle and bustle, like ants upon a mole-hill, about temporal affairs. They are in a still higher degree than Martha, careful and troubled about many things.

Now to recall you from this endless variety of vain pursuits, and direct your endeavors to the proper object, I can think of no better expedient than to explain and inculcate upon you the admonition of Christ to Martha, and his commendation of Mary upon this head.

Martha was the head of a little family, probably a widow in a village near Jerusalem, called Bethany. Her brother and sister, Lazarus and Mary, lived along with her. And what is remarkable concerning this little family is, that they were all lovers of Jesus; and their love was not without return on his side; for we are expressly told that 'Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus'. What a happy family is this! but oh how rare in the world! This was the happy place of retirement to Jesus, after the labors and fatigues of his ministry in the city, and here we often find him.

Though spent and exhausted with his public services—yet when he gets into the circle of a few friends in a private house, he cannot be idle; he still instructs them with his heavenly discourse; and his conversation is a constant sermon.

Mary, who was passionately devout, and eager for instruction, would not let such a rare opportunity slip—but sits down at the feet of this great Teacher, which was the posture of the Jewish pupils before their masters, and eagerly catches every word from his lips; from which dropped knowledge sweeter than honey from the honey-comb. Though she is solicitous for the comfort of her heavenly guest—yet she makes no great stir to provide for him an elegant or sumptuous entertainment; for she knew his happiness did not consist in luxurious eating and drinking. It was his food and his drink to do the will of his Father; and as the sustenance of his body, plain food was most acceptable to him. He was not willing that any should lose their souls, by losing opportunities of instruction, while they were making sumptuous provision for him.

Mary was also so deeply engaged about her salvation, that she was nobly careless about the little decencies of entertainments. The body and all its supports and gratifications, appeared of very small importance to her—when compared with the immortal soul. Oh! if the soul be but fed with the words of eternal life, it is enough. All this she did with Christ's warm approbation, and therefore her conduct is an example worthy of our imitation.

And if it were imitated, it would happily reform the pride, luxury, excessive delicacy, and multiform extravagance which have crept in upon us under the ingratiating names of politeness, decency, hospitality, good economy, and I know not what! These guilty superfluities and refinements render the life of some—a course of idolatry to so sordid a god as their bellies; and that of others a course of busy, laborious, and expensive trifling!

But to return: Martha, though a pious woman—yet, like too many among us, was too solicitous about these things. She seemed more concerned to maintain her reputation for good hospitality, than to improve in divine knowledge at every opportunity; and to entertain her guest rather as a gentleman, than as a divine teacher and the Savior of souls. Hence, instead of sitting at his feet with her sister, in the posture of a humble disciple—she was busy in making preparations; and her mind was distracted with the cares of her family.

As moderate labor and care about earthly things is lawful, and even a duty—people are not readily suspicious or easily convinced of their guilty excesses in these labors and cares. Hence Martha is so far from condemning herself on this account, that she blames her devout sister for not following her example! Nay, she has the confidence to complain to Christ himself of her neglect, and that in language too, that sounds somewhat rude and irreverent. "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" Are you so partial as to allow her to devolve all the trouble upon me—while she sits idle at your feet?

Jesus turns upon her with just severity, and throws the blame where it should lie, "Martha, Martha!" There is a vehemence and pungency in the repetition, "Martha, Martha! You are worried and upset about many things!" Your worldly mind has many objects; and many objects excite many cares and troubles, fruitless troubles and useless cares! Your restless mind is scattered among a thousand things, and tossed from one to another with an endless variety of concerns. But let me collect your thoughts and cares to one point, a point where they should all terminate: "only one thing is needful;" and therefore, dropping your excessive care about many things, make this one thing the great object of your pursuit. This one thing is what your sister is now attending to, while you are vainly careful about many things; and therefore, instead of blaming her conduct, I must approve it. She has made the best choice, "Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." After all your care and labor, the things of this vain world must be given up at last, and lost forever. But Mary has made a wiser choice; the portion she has chosen shall be hers forever; it shall never be taken away from her!"

But what does Christ mean by this one thing which alone is needful? I answer, We may learn what he meant, by the occasion and circumstances of his speaking. He mentions this one thing in an admonition to Martha for excessive worldly cares—and the neglect of an opportunity for promoting her salvation; and he expressly opposes this one thing—to the many things which engrossed her care; and therefore it must mean something different from and superior to all the pursuits of time. This one thing is that which Mary was so much concerned about, while attentively listening to his instruction. And what can that be but salvation as the end, and holiness as the means, or a proper care of the soul? This is that which is opposite and superior to the many cares of life—this is that which Mary was attending to and pursuing. And I may add, this is that good part which Mary had chosen, which should never be taken away from her; for that good part which Mary had chosen seems intended by Christ to explain what he meant by the one thing needful. Therefore the one thing needful must mean the salvation of the soul, and an earnest application to the means necessary to obtain this end above all other things in the world. To be holy—in order to be happy; to pray, to hear, to meditate, and use all the means of grace appointed to produce or cherish holiness in us; to use these means with constancy, frequency, earnestness, and zeal; to use them diligently whatever else is neglected, or to make all other things give way in comparison of this; this I apprehend is the one thing needful which Christ here intends: this is that which is absolutely necessary, necessary above all other things, and necessary forever.

The end, namely, salvation, will be granted by all to be necessary; and the necessity of the end renders the means also necessary. If it is necessary that you shall be forever happy, and escape everlasting misery—it is also necessary that you should be holy. For you can no more be saved without holiness—than you can be healthy without health, see without light, or live without food. And if holiness is necessary, then the earnest use of means appointed for the production and improvement of holiness in us must be necessary too. For you can no more expect to become holy without the use of these means—than to reap without sowing, or become truly virtuous and godly by chance or fate. To be holy in order to be happy, and to use all the means of grace in order to be holy, is therefore the one thing needful.

But why is this concern which is so complex, called 'one thing'? I answer: Though salvation and holiness include various ingredients, and though the means of grace are various—yet they may be all taken collectively

and called 'one thing'; that is, one great business, one important object of pursuit, in which all our endeavors and aims should center and terminate. It is also said to be one, in opposition to the many things that are the objects of a worldly mind.

This world owes its variety in a great measure to contradiction and inconsistency. There is no harmony or unity in the earthly objects of men's pursuits, nor in the means they use to secure them. Riches, honors, and pleasures generally clash. If a man will be rich—he must restrain himself in the pleasures of gratifying his eager appetites, and perhaps use some base artifice that may stain his honor. If he would be honorable—he must often be generous with his riches, and abstain from some sordid pleasures. If he would have the full enjoyment of sensual pleasures, he must often squander away his riches, and injure his honor to procure them.

The lusts of men—as well as their objects, are also various and contradictory. Covetousness and sensuality, pride and tranquility, envy and the love of ease, and a thousand jarring passions—maintain a constant fight in the sinner's heart.

The means for gratifying these lusts are likewise contrary; sometimes truth, sometimes falsehood; sometimes indolence, sometimes action and labor are necessary. In these things there is no unity of design, nor consistency of means; but the sinner is properly distracted, drawn this way and that, tossed from wave to wave; and there is no steadiness or uniformity in his pursuits.

But the work of salvation is one, the means and the end correspond, and the means are consistent one with another; and therefore the whole, though consisting of many parts, may be said to be one.

It may also be called the one thing needful—to intimate that this is needful above all other things. It is a common form of speech to say of that which is necessary above all other things—that it is the one or only thing necessary; and so we may understand this passage.

There are what we call the real necessities of life; such as food and water; there are also necessary callings and necessary labors. All these are necessary in a lower sense; necessary in their proper place. But in comparison of the great work of our salvation, they are all unnecessary; if we are but saved—we may do very well without them all. But salvation is so necessary, that nothing else deserves to be called necessary in comparison of it.

This shows you also, not only why this is called one thing—but why or in what sense, it is said to be necessary. It is of absolute and incomparable necessity! There is not absolutely necessity to our happiness, that we should be rich or honorable; nay, there is no absolute necessity to our happiness that we should live in this world at all, for we may live infinitely more happy in the heavenly world. And if life itself is not absolutely necessary, then much less are food, or clothing, or health—or any of those things which in a lower sense we call the necessities of life. In comparison of this—they are all needless.

I add farther, this one thing may be said to be necessary, because it is necessary always, or forever. The necessities of this life we cannot long need—for we must soon remove into a world where there is no room for them; but holiness and salvation we shall find needful always! They are needful under the calamities of life; needful in the agonies of death; needful in the eternal world; needful millions of ages hence; needful to all eternity; and without them—we are eternally undone! This is a necessity indeed! This is a necessity, in comparison of which all other necessities, are but superfluities.

I hope by this short explanation, that I have cleared the way through your understandings to your hearts; and to your hearts I would now address myself. However solemnly I may speak upon this interesting subject, you will have more reason to blame me for the deficiency, than for the excess of my zeal and solemnity. I hope I have entered this sacred place today with a sincere desire to do some service to your immortal souls before I leave it. And may I not hope that you have come here with a desire to receive some great advantage? If not, you may number your seeming act of religion, as among the sins of your life; you have come here today to sin away these sacred hours in hypocrisy and a profane mockery of the great God! But if you are willing to receive any benefit, hear attentively; hear, that your souls may live!

My first request to you is, that you would make this passage the test of your characters, and seriously inquire whether you have lived in the world as those who really and practically believe that this is the one thing of absolute necessity. Are not all the joys of heaven and your immortal souls—worth the little pains of seriously putting this short question to your consciences? Review your life, look into your hearts, and inquire: has this one thing lain more upon your hearts than all other things together? Has this been, above all other things, the object of your most vehement desires, your most earnest endeavors, and eager pursuit? I do not ask whether

you have heard or read that this one thing is necessary, or whether you have sometimes talked about it. I do not ask whether you have paid to God the compliment of appearing in his house once a week, or of performing him a little lip-service, morning and evening in your families, or in your closets, after you have served yourselves and the world all the rest of your time, without one affectionate thought of God.

Nor do I inquire whether in a pang of horror after the commission of some gross sin, that you have tried to make your conscience easy by a few prayers and tears, of which you form an opiate to cast you again into a dead sleep in sin! I do not ask whether you have performed many actions that are materially good, and abstained from many sins. All this you may have done—and yet have neglected the one thing needful all your lives!

But I ask you, whether this one thing needful has been habitually uppermost in your hearts, the favorite object of your desires, the aim of your most vigorous endeavors, the supreme happiness of your souls, and the principal object of your concern above all things in the world? Sirs, you may now hear this question with stupid unconcern and indifference; but I must tell you, that you will find, another day, how much depends upon it! In that day it will be found, that the main difference between true Christians and the various classes of sinners is this—God, Christ, holiness, and the concerns of eternity, are habitually uppermost in the hearts of the former! But, to the latter, they are generally but secondary things; and the world engrosses the vigor of their souls, and is the principal concern of their lives!

To serve God, to obtain his favor, and to be happy forever in his love—is the main business of the true Christian—to which all the concerns of the world and the flesh must give way! But to live in ease, in reputation, in pleasure, or riches, or to gratify himself in the pursuit and enjoyment of some created good—this is the main concern of the unsaved sinner! The one has made a hearty resignation of himself, and all that he is and has—to God, through Jesus Christ; he serves him with the best, and thinks nothing too good for him. But the other has his exceptions and reserves; he will serve God—provided it may consist with his ease, and pleasure, and temporal interest; he will serve God with a bended knee, and the external forms of devotion; but, with the vigor of his spirit, he serves the world and his flesh! This is the grand difference between a true Christian and the various forms of half-Christians and hypocrites.

And certainly this is a difference that may be discerned. The tenor of a man's practice, and the object of his love, especially of his highest love and practical esteem—must certainly be very distinguishable from a secondary thing, and from the object of a languid passion, or mere speculation. Therefore, if you make but an impartial trial, you have reason to hope you will make a just discovery of your true character; or if you cannot make the discovery yourselves, call in the assistance of others. Do not ask your worldly and sensual neighbors, for they are but poor judges, and they will flatter you in self-defense; but ask your pious friends whether you have spoken and acted like people who practically made this the one thing needful. They can tell you what subject you talked most seriously about, what pursuit seemed to lie most upon your hearts, and chiefly to exhaust your activity.

Brethren, I beseech you, by one means or other, to bring this matter to an outcome, and let it hang in suspense no longer. Why are you so indifferent how this matter stands with you? Is it because you imagine you may be true Christians, and obtain salvation, however this matter is with you? Do not be deceived! No man can serve two masters, whose commands are contrary; and you cannot serve God and mammon, with a service equally devoted to both! If any man loves the world, with supreme affection—the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2:15. Do not be deceived! God is not mocked: whatever a man sows—that shall he also reap! He who sows to his flesh—shall from the flesh reap corruption: a miserable harvest indeed! But he who sows to the Spirit—shall from the Spirit reap everlasting life. Galatians 6:7, 8.

Therefore you may be sure that if you live after the flesh—you shall certainly die; and that you can never enjoy the one thing needful, unless you mind and pursue it above all other things! But I shall not urge you any farther to try yourselves by this test. I take it for granted the consciences of some of you have determined the matter, and that you are plainly convicted of having hitherto neglected the one thing needful. Allow me then honestly to expose your conduct in its proper colors, and tell you what you have been doing—while you were busy about other things, and neglecting this one thing needful.

1. However well you have improved your TIME for other purposes, you have lost it all, unless you have improved it in securing the one thing needful. The proper notion of time is, that it is a space for repentance. Time is given us—to prepare for eternity. If this is done, we have lived long enough, and the great end of time and life is answered, whatever else be undone. But if this is undone, you have lived in vain, and all your time is lost, however busily and successfully you have pursued other things! Though you have studied yourselves

pale to furnish your minds with knowledge; though you have spent the night and the day in heaping up riches, or climbing up to the pinnacle of honor, and not lost an hour that might be turned to your advantage—yet you have been most wretchedly fooling away your time, and lost it all, if you have not laid it out in securing the one thing needful!

And, believe me, time is a precious thing. So it will appear in a dying hour, or in the eternal world, to the greatest spendthrift among you. Then, oh for a year, or even a week, or a day—to secure that one thing which you are now neglecting! And will you now waste your time—while you improve it? Shall so precious a blessing be lost? By this calculation, how many days, how many years—have you lost for ever! For, is not that lost, which is spent in frustrating the end for which it was given you? Time was given you to secure an eternity of happiness—but you have spent it in adding sin to sin, and consequently in treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath! And is not your time then a thousand times worse than lost?

Let me tell you, if you continue in this foolish course to the end, you will wish a thousand times, either that you had never had one hour's time given you—or that you had made a better use of it!

2. Whatever else you have been doing, you have lost your LABOR with your time, if you have not labored above all things, for this one thing needful. No doubt you have been busy about something all your life; but you might as well have been idle! You have been busy—in accomplishing nothing worth while! You have perhaps toiled through many anxious and laborious days—and your nights have shared in the anxieties and labors of your days. But if you have not labored for the one thing necessary, all your labor and all the fruits of it are lost!

Indeed, God may have made use of you for the good of his church, or of your country, as we make use of thorns and briars to stop a breach, or of useless wood for fuel to warm our families; but as to any lasting and solid advantage to yourselves, all your labor has been lost!

But this is not all. Not only your secular labor is lost—but all your toil and pains, if you have used any in the duties of religion, they are lost likewise! All your reading, hearing, praying; all your serious thoughts of death and eternity; all your struggles with particular lusts and temptations; all the kind things you have done to mankind—all are lost, since you have performed them by halves—with a lukewarm heart, and have not made the one thing needful your great business and pursuit!

All these things will not save you; and what is that religion good for—which will not save your souls? What do those religious endeavors avail—which will allow you to fall into hell after all? Certainly such religion is vain!

And now, my hearers, do you believe this—or do you not?

If you do believe this—will you, dare you still go on in the same course?

If you do not believe it—let me reason the matter with you a little. You will not believe that all the labor and pains you have taken all your life have been quite lost: no, you now enjoy the fruits of them. But show me now, if you can, what you have gotten by all that stir you have made—which will follow one step beyond the grave, or that you can call your own tomorrow! Where is that sure immortal acquisition that you can carry with you into the eternal world?

Were you to die this hour—would it afford you any pleasure to reflect that you have lived a merry life, and had your fill of sensual pleasures; or that you have labored for riches and honors, and perhaps acquired them? Will this reflection afford you pleasure—or pain? Will this abate the agony of the eternal pain of hell—or make up for the loss of heaven, which you willfully incurred by an over-eager pursuit of these perishing vanities?

Do you not see the extravagant folly, the crazed frenzy of such a conduct? Alas! while you are neglecting the one thing needful, what are you doing but spending your time and labor . . .
in laborious idleness,
honorably debasing yourselves,
delightfully tormenting yourselves,
wisely befooling yourselves, and
frugally impoverishing and ruining yourselves forever?

A child or an idiot playing with a feather—are not so foolish as you in your conduct—while you are so seriously pursuing the affairs of time, and neglecting those of eternity! But,

3. This is not all: all your labor and pains have not only been lost while you have neglected this one thing—**but you have taken pains to ruin yourselves, and labored hard all your lives for your own destruction!** To this you will immediately answer, "God forbid that we should do anything to hurt ourselves! We were far from having any such design!" But the question is not, what was your design? But, what is the unavoidable consequence of your conduct, according to the nature of things, and the unchangeable constitution of heaven?

Whatever your design in going on in sin is—the wages of sin is death, eternal death! You may indulge the carnal mind, and walk after the flesh—and yet hope no bad consequence will follow. But God has told you that to be carnally minded is death, and that if you live after the flesh—you shall die. The robber on the highway has no design to be hanged; but this does not render him a jot safer. Therefore, design what you will—it is certain you are positively destroying yourselves, while your labors about other things, hinder you from pursuing the one thing needful.

And does not this thought shock you, that you should be acting the part of enemies against yourselves, the most pernicious and deadly enemies to yourselves in the whole universe!! No enemy in the whole universe could do you that injury—which you are doing to yourselves!! To tempt you to sin is all the devil can do; but the temptation alone can do you no injury; it is consenting to it that ruins you; and this consent is your own voluntary act. All the devils in hell could not force you to sin, without your consent; and therefore all the devils in hell cannot injure you—as you do yourselves! God has not given them so much power over you—as he has given you over yourselves; and this power you abuse to your own destruction! Oh! in what a crazed state is the world of the ungodly! If any other man is their enemy—how do they resent it! But they are their own worst enemies—and yet they pamper themselves!

If another occasions them a disappointment in their pursuits, defrauds them of an expected good, or lay schemes to make them miserable—what sullen grudges, what keen revenge, what flaming resentments immediately rise in their hearts against him! And yet they are all their lives disinheriting themselves of the heavenly inheritance, laying a bomb—to blow up all their own hopes, and heaping a mountain of guilt upon themselves—to sink them into the bottomless pit! And all this while they think they are the best friends to themselves, and consulting their own interest! As for the devil, the common enemy of mankind, they abhor him; but they are worse to themselves than devils—and yet never fall out with themselves for it.

This, sinners, may seem a harsh representation of your conduct, but, alas! it is true. And if it is so shocking to you to hear it, what must it be to be guilty of it! And oh! think what must be the consequences of such a conduct, such monstrous suicide!

4. If you have hitherto neglected the one thing needful, you have unmanned yourselves, acted beneath and contrary to your own reason, and in plain terms behaved as if you had been out of your senses! If you have the use of your reason—it must certainly tell you for what it was given to you. And I beseech you to tell me what God gave you your reason for—but . . .
to serve the God who made you,
to secure his favor,
to prepare for your eternal state, and
to enjoy the supreme good as your portion?

Can you once think that God gave you your reason—for such low purposes as the contrivances, labor, and pursuits of this vain life, and to make you a more ingenious sort of brutes? He was master of an unusual share of reason who said, "There is very little difference between having reason and having none—IF we had nothing to do with it but to lay up for our food, and make provision for this corruptible flesh, and had not another life to mind."

Therefore I may safely affirm that you have cast away your reason, and acted as if you were out of your wits—if you have not employed your rational powers in the pursuit of the one thing needful. Where was your reason—when your dying flesh was preferred to your immortal spirit? Was reason your guide when you chose the trash of this perishing world—and sought it more than the favor of God and all the joys of heaven? Can you pretend to common sense, when you might have had the pardon of sin, sanctifying grace, and a title to heaven, secured to you before now? But you have neglected all, and instead of having a sure title to heaven, or being prepared for it—you are fitted for destruction, and nothing else! And you are only awaiting for a fever or an accident, or some other executioner of divine vengeance—to cut the thread of life, and let you sink to hell by your own weight! There you gravitate under the load of sin—as naturally as a stone to the center; and you need no other weight to sink you down!

What have you done all your life—to make a wise man think you truly reasonable? Is that your reason: to be wise to do evil—while to do good you have no knowledge; or to be ingenious and active about the trifles of time—while you neglect that great work for which you were created and redeemed? Can you be wise—and yet not consider your eternal end? Nay, can you pretend to so much as common sense—while you sell your eternal salvation for the sordid pleasures of a few flying years? Have you common sense—when you will not keep yourselves out of everlasting fire? What can a madman do worse, than willfully destroy himself? And this, YOU are doing every day!!

And yet these very people are proud of their madness, and are apt to fling the charge of folly upon others, especially if they observe some poor weak creatures, while they are groaning under a sense of sin, and anxious about their eternal state. Then what a clamor they raise against religion and preciseness, as the ready way to make people run mad! Then they even dare to publish their resolution that they will not read and think so much upon these things, lest it should drive them out of their senses.

O miserable mortals! is it possible that they should be more dangerously mad than they are already? Do you lay out your reason, your strength, and time—in pursuing vain shadows, and in feeding a mortal body for the grave, while the important realities of the eternal world, and the salvation of your immortal souls are forgotten or neglected! Do you sell your Savior with Judas for a little money, and exchange your part in God and heaven—for the sordid pleasures of sin, which are but for a season! And are you afraid of seriously reflecting upon this course, that you may reform it, for fear such thoughts should make you mad? What greater madness than this, can you fear? Will you run from God, from Christ, from mercy, from the saints, from heaven itself—for fear of being mad? Alas! you are mad in the worst sense already! Will you run into hell—to prove yourselves in your senses?

He was a wise and good man who said, "Though the loss of a man's understanding is a grievous affliction, and such as I hope God will never lay upon me—yet I had a thousand times rather go distracted to Bedlam with the excessive care about my salvation, than to be one of you that cast away the care of your salvation for fear of being distracted; and will go among the infernal Bedlams into hell—for fear of being mad." Distraction in itself is not a moral evil—but a physical, like those disorders of the body from which it often proceeds, and therefore is no object for punishment; and had you no capacity of understanding, you would have a cloak for your sin; but your madness is your crime, because it is voluntary, and therefore you must give an account for it to the Supreme Judge!

It would be easy to offer many more considerations to expose the absurdity and danger of your conduct in neglecting the one thing necessary; but these must suffice for the present hour.

And I only desire you to consider farther, if this be a just view of the conduct of such as are guilty of this neglect—then in what a miserable, pitiable condition is the world in general! I have so often tried the utmost energy of my words upon you—with so little success as to many, that I am quite grown weary of them. Allow me therefore for once to borrow the more striking and pungent words of one now in heaven; of one who had more success than almost any of his contemporaries or successors in the important work of "converting sinners from the error of their way and saving souls from death." I mean that incomparable preacher, Richard Baxter, who sowed an immortal seed in his parish of Kidderminster, which grows and brings forth fruit to this day. His words have, through the divine blessing, been irresistible to thousands; and oh that such of you, my dear hearers, whose hearts may have been armored against my words, may not be so against his also!

"Were it possible for a man to see the affections and motions of all the world at once, as God sees them—what a pitiful sight it would be! What a stir do they make, alas, poor souls! for they know not what! while they forget, or slight, or hate the one thing needful. What a heap of gadding ants would we see, that do nothing but gather sticks and straws! Look among people of every rank, in city and country, and look into families around you, and see what trade it is they are most busily driving on, whether it be for heaven or earth! And whether you can discern by their care and labors, that they understand what is the one thing necessary! They are as busy as bees; but not for honey—but in spinning such a spider's web as the broom of death will presently sweep down! Job 8:14. They labor hard—but for what? For the food that perishes—but not for that which endures to everlasting life. John 6:27. They are diligent seekers; but for what? Not first for God, his kingdom and righteousness—but for that which they might have had as an addition to their blessedness. Matthew 6:33. They are still doing—but what are they doing? Even undoing themselves by running away from God—to hunt after the perishing pleasures of the world. Instead of providing for the life to come—they are making provision to fulfill the lusts of their flesh! Romans 13:14. Some of them hear the word of God—but presently choke it by the deceitfulness of riches, and the cares of this life. Luke 8:14. They are careful and troubled about many things; but the one thing that should be all to them—is cast away as if it were nothing.

Providing for the flesh and minding the world—**is all the employment of their lives.** They labor with a doggish appetite for their trash; but for holiness, they have no appetite, and are worse than indifferent to the things that are indeed worthy. They have no covetousness for the things which they are commanded earnestly to covet. 1 Corinthians 12:31. They have so little hunger and thirst after righteousness, that a very little or none will satisfy them. In religion, they are pleading always for moderation, and against too much, and too earnest, and too long; and all is too much with them—that is above stark nothing, or dead hypocrisy! And all is too earnest and too long with them—that would make religion seem important, or engage them to seem serious in their own profession, or put them past jest in the worship of God and the matters of their salvation! Let but their children or servants neglect their worldly business, (which I confess they should not do,) and they shall hear of it with both their ears; but if they sin against God, or neglect his Word or worship, they shall meet with more patience than Eli's son did—a cold reproof is usually the most! And it is well—if they are not encouraged in their sin; it is well if a child or servant that begins to be serious for salvation, that he is not rebuked, derided, and hindered by them! If on their days of labor they oversleep themselves, they shall be sure to be called up to work, (and good reason;) but when do they call them up to prayer? when do they urge them to consider or converse upon the things that concern their everlasting life? The Lord's own day, which is appointed to be set apart for spiritual matters—is wasted in idleness or worldly talk. Come at any time into their company, and you may talk enough, and too much of the news, or other men's matters, of their worldly business, sports, and pleasures—but about God and their salvation—they have so little to say, and that so heartlessly—as if they were things that belonged not to their care and duty, and no whit concerned them! Talk with them about the renovation of the soul, the nature of holiness, and the life to come—and you will find them almost as dumb as a fish. The most do not understand matters of this nature, nor much desire or care to understand them. If one would teach them personally, they are too old to learn, though not too old to be ignorant of the matters they were made for, and preserved for, in the world. They are too wise—to learn to be wise, and too good—to be taught how to be godly; though not too wise to follow the seducements of the devil and the world; nor too good to be the slaves of Satan and the despisers and enemies of godliness!"

"If they do anything which they call serving God, it is some cold and heartless use of words to make themselves believe that even though they love their sins—they shall be saved. But God will call that a serving their sins and abominations—which they will call a serving of God. Some of them will confess that holiness is good—but they hope God will be merciful to them without it. And others so hate holiness, that it is a displeasing irksome thing to them to hear any serious discourse of holiness; and they detest and deride those as intolerant, fanatical, and troublesome, who that diligently seek the one thing necessary! So that, if the belief of the most may be judged by their practices, we may confidently say, that they do not practically believe that they will ever be brought to judgment, or that there is any heaven or hell to be expected! And that their confession of the truth of the Scriptures and the articles of the Christian faith—are no proofs that they heartily take them to be true.

"Who can be such a stranger to the world—as not to see that this is the case of the greatest part of men? And, which is worst of all, they go on in this course—against all that can be said to them, and will give no impartial, considerate hearing to the truth, which would recover them to their wits—but they live as if it would be a felicity to them in hell—to think that they came there by willful resolution, and in despite of the remedy!"

This, sinners, is a true representation of your case, drawn by one who well knew it, and lamented it. And what do you now think of it yourselves? What do you think will be the consequence of such a course? Is it safe to persist in it? Will you still go on, troubling yourselves with many worldly things? or will you resolve for the future to mind the one thing needful above all?

I beseech you to come to some thought and resolution. Time is on the wing, and does not allow you to hesitate in so plain and important an affair.

Do you need any farther excitements? Then I shall try the force of one consideration more which is contained in my text—and that is **NECESSITY**. Remember necessity, the most pressing, absolute necessity, enforces this care upon you. One thing is needful, absolutely needful, and needful above all other things. This, one would think, is such an argument as cannot but prevail.

What exploits has necessity performed in the world! What arts has it discovered as the mother of invention! What labors, what energies, what sufferings has it undergone! What dangers has it encountered! What difficulties has it overcome! Necessity is a plea which you think will warrant you to do anything and excuse anything. Reasoning against necessity, is but reasoning against a hurricane; it bears all away before it! To obtain the necessities of life, as they are called—how much will men do and suffer! Nay, with what hardships and perils will they not endure for things that they imagine necessary, not to their life—but to their ease, their

honor, or their pleasure!

But what is this necessity, when compared to that which I am now urging upon you! In comparison of this, the most necessary of those worldly things are but superfluities; for if your ease, or honor, or pleasure, or even your life in this world is not absolutely necessary, as they cannot be to the heirs of immortality; then certainly those things which you imagine necessary to your ease, your honor, your pleasure, or mortal life—are still less necessary.

But oh! to escape everlasting misery, and to secure everlasting salvation—this is the grand necessity! This will appear necessary in every point of your immortal duration; necessary when you are done with this world for ever, and must leave all its cares, enjoyments, and pursuits behind you!

And shall not this grand necessity prevail upon you to work out your salvation, and make that your great business; when a far less necessity, a necessity that will last but a few years at most, sets you and the world around you upon such hard labors and eager pursuits for perishing vanities? All the necessity in the world—is nothing in comparison of that which lies upon you to work out your salvation; and shall this have no weight with you?

If you do not labor or contrive for the bread that perishes—you must beg or starve. But if you will not labor for the bread that endures unto everlasting life—you must burn in hell forever!

You must lie in prison—if your debts with men be not paid. But, oh! what is it to the prison of hell, where you must be confined forever—if your debts to the justice of God are not remitted, and you do not obtain a saving interest in the righteousness of Christ, which alone can make satisfaction for them!

You must suffer hunger and nakedness—unless you take care to provide food and clothing. But you must suffer eternal banishment from God and all the joys of his presence—if you do not labor to secure the one thing needful. Without the riches of this world—you may be rich in faith, and heirs of the heavenly inheritance. Without earthly pleasures—you may have joy unspeakable and full of glory, in the love of God, and the expectation of the kingdom reserved in heaven for you! Without health of body—you may have happiness of spirit; and even without this mortal life—you may enjoy eternal life. Without the things of the world—you may live in poverty for a little while—but then you will soon be rich above the greatest princes, when in heaven. But without this one thing needful—you are undone, absolutely undone. Though you were as rich as Croesus—yet you "are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked!"

Your very being becomes a curse to you. It is your curse—that you are a man, a reasonable creature. It had been infinitely better for you—if you had been a toad or a snake—and so incapable of sin and of immortality, and consequently of eternal punishment!

Oh then let this grand necessity prevail with you! I know you have other needs, which you should moderately labor to provide for—but oh how small they are—and of how short continuance! If your life and your all should be lost—you may find more than all in heaven! But if you miss at this one thing—then all the world cannot make up the loss!

Therefore to conclude with the awakening and resistless words of Richard Baxter, "Awake, you sluggish, careless souls! The house over your head is in a flame! The hand of God is lifted up in wrath against you! If you love yourselves, prevent the stroke! Vengeance is at your backs; the wrath of God pursues your sin; and woe to you if he finds it upon you when he overtakes you! Away with it speedily! Up and begone; return to God! Make Christ and mercy your friends in time, if you love your lives!"

The Judge is coming! Many have heard of it so long—yet still do not believe it! You shall shortly see the majesty of his appearance and the dreadful glory of his face; and yet do you not make ready for such a day! Yes, though now the partition that stands between you and the world to come may keep unbelievers strangers to the things that most concern them—yet death will quickly find a portal to let you in; and then, sinners, you will find such doings there as you little thought of, or did not sensibly regard upon earth.

Before your friends will have time enough to wrap up your pale corpse in your winding-sheet, you will see and feel that which will tell you—that one thing was necessary! If you die without this one thing necessary, before your friends have finished your funeral—your souls will have taken up their places among devils in endless torments and despair! And all the wealth, and honor, and pleasure that the world afforded you—will then not ease you at all. This is sad—but it is true, sirs; for God has spoken it.

The One Thing Needful

Up, therefore, and bestir yourself for the life of your souls. Necessity will awake even the sluggard. Necessity, we say, will break through stone walls! The proudest will stoop to necessity; the most slothful will bestir themselves in necessity; the most careless will be industrious in necessity! Necessity will make men do anything that is possible, which must be done. And is not necessity, the highest necessity, your own necessity, able to make you cast away your sins, and take up a holy and heavenly life? O poor souls! is there a greater necessity for your sin—than of your salvation; and of pleasing your flesh for a little time—than of pleasing the Lord and escaping everlasting misery? Oh that you would consider what I say! May the Lord give you understanding in all things. Amen."