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The Importance Of Hearing God's Word

by Zac Poonen

The overwhelming necessity of spending time each day with God's Word is implied clearly in the words of Jesus to Martha in Luke 10: 38-42. Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." How striking are Jesus' words to Martha in verse 42: "One thing is needful!" There may be plenty of good things to be done and many indeed that may justly be considered essential. But, Jesus affirmed, one thing above all others was needful. What was that one thing? There are many other things which may help us and which may prove useful, but this one thing above all others is absolutely essential. We can no more do without it than our physical bodies can do without oxygen. It is quite indispensable. The supreme essential for our spirits is indeed just this- to sit at the Lord's feet daily to hear His Word.

The Lord Jesus knew, better than anyone else, all the factors that affect a man's life. He knew every possible situation that any man could ever find himself in. He knew the dangers that lay ahead of every man and He knew all the wiles of Satan. He knew what was necessary for man's spiritual growth, for He alone knew the relative importance and unimportance of things. Knowing all this, He said that one thing was needful above all else. He used similar words in Luke 4:4. "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God." This is a quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3, where reference is made to the manna with which God fed the Israelites for 40 years in the wilderness. The Israelites were told there that God's purpose in giving them the manna daily from heaven was that they might, in like manner, learn to receive God's Word. If they were to be strengthened for their wilderness journey those Israelites needed the manna daily. Even so does man require to receive the Word of God daily, if he is to be empowered to face the trials and vicissitudes of life.

Jesus never made these statements lightly. He was seeking to impress upon His disciples the absolute necessity of hearing His Word daily. If that is true, then it follows that a life that is lived without time given to meditation on God's written Word is a wasted life, no matter what else it may have achieved.

In Luke 17:26-30, Jesus tells us that the last days will be like the days of Noah and of Lot, in which people ate, drank, bought, sold, planted, built, and so on. Have you noticed that none of these things are sinful in themselves? They are all legitimate activities. Why then did Jesus mention them as being peculiarly characteristic of those sinful days? Because the people of those days were so occupied with these legitimate activities as to have no time for God at all. The Devil succeeded in getting them to crowd God out of their lives altogether. This of course resulted, as it always will, in moral decay and corruption.

Compare this state of affairs with what we see in the world today and we shall find an exact similarity of attitude and of consequent result. Men and women are too busy to have any time to listen to God. Look into your own life and see if this is not true. The spirit of the world has crept into the very heart of the believer. Even though science has invented for us many time-saving devices which our forefathers did not possess, yet man finds himself rushed for time. Today we can travel by car, train or aeroplane where they had to travel on animals or on their own two feet. Our ancestors had to spend much longer doing the daily household chores which today are done for us by gadgets and machines. Yet many of them found much more time for God than most people find today. Why? Because they had their priorities right. They put first things first.

If we are to be effective witnesses for our Lord, it is imperative that we can spend time each day at His feet listening to His voice. There are many today who are ambitious to preach, who have never developed this habit of listening to God's voice daily. The result is a sad paucity of "the word of the Lord" and a sickening abundance of man's words. Of how very few of today's preachers can it be said that "the word of the Lord is with him" (2 Kings 3:12). Yet this was the distinguishing mark of every true servant of God in the Bible. No man has the right to speak to other men about God, who has not first spent time listening to what God Himself says, and this refers to private witnessing as well as to public preaching. It is written of Moses that he went in before the Lord and then "came out and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded" (Exod. 34:34). Joshua was told that his life would be a success only if he meditated on God's Word daily (Josh. 1:8). Samuel is another classic example of one who patiently waited to hear God speak, and then spoke to the

people. The result was that the Lord allowed no single word of his to fall to the ground (1 Sam. 3:19).

In a prophetic reference to the Lord Jesus in Isaiah 50:4, it is said of Him that morning by morning God spoke to Him, for His ears were disciplined to hear His Father's voice. The result was, as the same verse tells us, that Jesus had a ready word for all who came to Him, according to their need. He was truly the Father's perfect mouthpiece. If this habit of listening to God's voice daily was necessary for Jesus Himself, then how much more is it so for us. We shall never be able to minister adequately to those in need if we fail here. It is only when we learn to "hear as the learned" that we shall have "the tongue of the learned." Unfortunately, many who should have been teaching others by now are still spiritual babes, because they have either ignored or neglected this "one thing."

Listening to the Lord does not mean merely reading the Bible. There are many who read their Bibles purely as a matter of routine. Listening to the Lord means more than that. It means meditating on His Word until we receive, through it, His message for us. Thus alone can our minds be renewed and conformed growingly to the mind of Christ. But many who read their Bibles have never yet learned thus to meditate.

There are at least three spiritual truths to be learnt from Mary's sitting at the feet of Jesus. Sitting-unlike walking, running, or even standing-is primarily a picture of rest. This teaches us that our hearts must be at rest and our minds still, before we can hear God speaking to us. Unconfessed sin will preclude the former, while over-occupation with the cares and riches of this world will stand in the way of the latter. With a conscience ill at ease or a mind filled with anxiety or fear, how can we hope to hear God's "still small voice?" Psalm 46:10 tells us that we must be still if we are to know God.

Sitting at a person's feet is also a picture of humility. Mary was not sitting on a chair on the same level as Jesus, but on a lower level. God never speaks to a proud man, except in judgement. But He stands ever ready to speak and to offer His grace to the humble soul who will be as a child before Him (Matt. 11:25).

Thirdly, sitting as Mary did is a picture of subjection. It is the attitude of a disciple in the presence of His master. This implies subjection to the Lord in our obedience to His Word. God does not speak to us merely to satisfy our curiosity or to give us information. His Word is an expression of His heart's desire. He speaks in order that we may obey. Jesus made it clear in John 7:17 that only as we are willing to do God's will shall we receive the revelation of that will.

Many Christians go through months and years of reading the Bible without seeking to hear God speaking to them through it. Still they seem to be quite satisfied. I ask you, Do you hear the Lord's voice each day? If not, what is the cause? He speaks to those who listen. What is it that is stopping your spirit's ears? Is it lack of stillness before Him, lack of humility of spirit, or lack of obedience to what He has already said to you? Or is it perhaps a lack of desire itself? Whatever it be, God grant that it may be remedied at once and permanently. Pray Samuel's prayer, "Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth." Then open your Bible and seek the face of the Lord earnestly, and you too shall hear His voice.