

God is still looking

It just wasn't fair. Here she was, running herself off her feet, busy with all the preparations, while her sister just sat there, oblivious to all that needed doing.

'Can't Mary see that I need help?' she thought crossly. And unable to contain herself any longer, her irritation spilled over on to Jesus, who really should have noticed how unfair the situation was!

'Don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?' she challenged him. 'Tell her to help me!'

But the gentle rebuke of Jesus revealed a priority of a different kind: 'Martha . . . you are worried and upset about many things,' he replied, 'but only *one thing* is needed' (Luke 10:38-42).

And it was Mary who had recognised it.

Martha had allowed herself to be weighed down with all the activities of her serving. But Mary had 'chosen what is better' and, sitting at the feet of Jesus, far from wasting time, she listened carefully to every word he said.

Jesus was presenting Martha with a clear option: 'Your work or my word'.

One thing at a time

As we saw in the last chapter, there is only one way for us to go – God isn't multi-optional. The church loyalty question is basically simple. But so often the decisions which confront us seem complex and confusing. Where do we start?

In his grace God makes it easy for us. Asking us to deal with only *one thing* at a time, he faces us with a priority choice which helps to set the pattern for resolving every remaining issue.

Martha had to learn that, although the practical things of life have to be done, time must be taken just to sit at Jesus' feet and soak up his word. Knowing her weakness in this area, God placed her in a situation where that specific weakness would be revealed and a decision be required: her work or God's word.

To take another example, see how the Lord dealt with a young man who came to him seeking eternal life. He was a religious young man, moral, upright, honourable, likeable, regular at synagogue, obedient to the law – and rich.

The particular stumbling-block in his life was an attitude that allowed the temporary security of his wealth to rob him of the real security of peace with God and treasure in heaven. And Jesus highlighted this basic issue.

'*One thing* you lack,' he said – and once again the simple options came into focus as Jesus effectively offered him a choice: 'Your money or my life' (Mark 10:17-22).

It wasn't wrong for the young man to be rich. It wasn't wrong for him to have possessions. But Jesus was requiring a greater priority in the man's life than his possessions – to the extent that he would be willing to part with it all.

In effect Jesus was saying, 'What is your priority? What comes first in your thinking when you make decisions? What is the most important thing to you?'

If it isn't him – if it isn't the Lord Jesus Christ, and doing his will – then God will take you one step at a time, facing you with one issue at a time, until he becomes your priority and everything else finds its true perspective in relation to him.

A man after God's own heart

God described King David as a man after his own heart (Acts 13:22). It isn't surprising, then, to discover that he was a man of straightforward decisions.

'*One thing* I ask of the Lord,' said David (Psalm 27:4). His request was for a life of fellowship with God. To be overawed, not with the splendour of the Lord's house, but by the beauty of the Lord himself. Not to depart from the house of the Lord in confusion, but in confidence, knowing that he had sought the Lord and found him. He saw his choice as one between ritual and reality, liturgy and life, and he was choosing life.

Paul, likewise, had a singleness of purpose. '*One thing* I do,' he testified, 'I press on towards the goal' (Philippians 3:13-14).

There was a time when he had boasted of his traditions, holding and practising them more zealously than any of his contemporaries. But Jesus had broken into his life and taken hold of him. All he could do now was press on to attain the goal for which the Lord had laid hold of him.

The choice for him – as for many church members today – was go on or go back; the past or the future; history or destiny. And Paul had no difficulty choosing: he was going on.

But what about us? What are our priorities? How are we choosing? Are we gravitating to a place where we find comfort and confidence in our own ability and respectability? Or are we reaching for the one thing we lack, and responding to the call for radical discipleship, with all its implications for local church loyalty?

If we look back at the biblical characters we have just considered we will find that our own priorities and allegiance are based on very similar criteria to theirs.

Are we, like Martha, attracted to a full social programme, a hive of activity and a chance to shine? Or are we motivated, like Mary, towards the one really needful thing – a clear revelation of the word of God?

Do we tend towards ritual and regulation? Or, like David, is the one thing we desire not ceremony but a living relationship with the Lord? Are we dyed-in-the-wool traditionalists or, like Paul since his dynamic encounter with Jesus, are we doing the one thing God has called us to do – pressing on to the fulfilment of our destiny?

What is God looking for? Paul explained that the ‘one thing’ that gave purpose to his life was the outworking of a divine intervention in it. He knew that he had been ‘taken hold of’. He was conscious of having been chosen by God, sought by him, and found and enrolled into his service (Philippians 3:12-14).

God is continually seeking men and women who will respond to him in just such a way. Ever since the fall of Adam, when God sought him in the garden, he has been looking for those with whom he can renew fellowship. And when the right time came he sent forth his Son, who described his own commission like this: ‘The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost’ (Luke 19:10).

But our salvation is far greater than ‘sins forgiven and a home in heaven’. The Lord sought and saved us not just to wait longingly for the ‘sweet by and by’ but to make a dynamic impact on the ‘nasty here and now’!

Paul’s prayer for the church was, ‘That the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you’ (Ephesians 1:18). That is, that we should understand the call of God upon our lives and so be motivated to do the works he has called us to do.

You see, to fulfil the call of God, something more than a mere intellectual appreciation of his will for us is required. We must grasp in our hearts that God has called each of us, individually, to achieve great things for him.

You may say, ‘Well, I’m nobody special. What strength or ability do I have to do anything for God?’ And we can easily convince ourselves that we have nothing to offer him and are totally unusable. But, strange though it may seem, this is the

very qualification we need!

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: 'Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him' (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

God takes us, and by the power of his Holy Spirit makes us into something we could never be in our own strength. What we are not, he makes us to be – channels of his life and power, chosen and called to impact and change the world.

Our success for God is already guaranteed by the very fact that he has chosen us, for God never does anything frivolously. He knew when he chose you what he wanted you to do and be. And when you really understand the greatness of God's call upon your life, you will be thrilled with a sense of your destiny and motivated into his purposes.

But, again, it requires a right response from you. Ask God to show you his purpose for *your* life. Pray Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1 for yourself and allow God to impress upon you an understanding of his call upon your life. Not you as one more out of millions, but you as an individual, cherished by God and chosen by him before birth for a destiny which only you can fulfil.

'I looked for a man among them'

Before we leave this chapter let's look quickly at some examples of the Lord's search through humanity to find people who will respond to him.

Conversing with a woman at the well of Sychar, Jesus gave her a precious insight into the kind of people God is seeking. 'A time is coming and has now come,' he said, 'when the true

worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks' (John 4:23).

God is looking for a people who will *worship* him with all their hearts – that is one of the hallmarks of the true people of God. Paul, contrasting the born again believers with those still bound in dead, legalistic tradition, and referring to the old practice of circumcision, said, 'We are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh' (Philippians 3:3 NASB).

Restored relationship with God will always express itself in extravagant praise and worship. The psalmist tells us that God is enthroned upon, or inhabits, the praises of his people (Psalm 22:3 margin). And he continues to look for such a people among whom he can feel at home.

King David really knew how to praise and worship the Lord! His psalms are full of stirring calls to join him in glorifying the God of his salvation, and Jerusalem must have resounded with the sound of music and singing during his golden reign. He even invented musical instruments in his desire to expand the expressions of his creative worship.

Samuel the prophet described God's choice of David like this: 'The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart' (1 Samuel 13:14). And the Lord's own assessment of David was: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; *he will do everything I want him to do*' (Acts 13:22).

The Lord continues to look for those, like David, whose hearts will respond to his own, and who are willing, from the heart, to do all he asks of them – a people willing to serve his purposes here and now (Acts 13:36).

Tragically, soon after the glorious age of David's reign, the nation slipped into a decline which culminated in a humiliating defeat and captivity in Babylon. But even here God raised up his prophets to bring his word to his exiled people.

Ezekiel revealed the heart of God to this rebellious nation, portraying the Lord searching among the teeming masses of Jerusalem for just one person who would, by his righteous

intercession, turn the tide of disaster from the beleaguered city.

'I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so that I would not have to destroy it, but I found none' (Ezekiel 22:30).

What an indictment! Among all the religious multitudes there wasn't one person to take the side of the Lord. Not one voice raised in God's cause. Not one arm stretched out to rebuild the devastated city. Not one foot to stand steadfastly in the gap.

Tragic, yes, but the greater tragedy is when, having failed to learn its lesson, we repeat the past in the present. The Babylonian captivity may be over, but many have allowed the pressures of life to ensnare them and pull them away from God, carrying them away like captives to a strange land. Gone is the joy of their salvation, and gone is the exciting tug of destiny on their lives.

Others cower behind the cracking walls of a besieged church, hoping only to survive until Jesus comes, whereas in God's plan the church was built to be invading and invincible. He is looking for men and women who will rise up out of the dust of defeatism and fatalistic acceptance of the way things are.

He is looking for a people who will rebuild the ruins of many generations, who will take their stand in the purpose of God, and who will believe to see the restoration of Zion - a church restored and on the move.