

Luke 10:42

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Analysis

Jesus corrects Martha: 'But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her' (ένὸς δέ ἐστιν χρεία· Μαρία γὰρ τὴν ἀγαθὴν μερίδα ἔξελέξατο, ἡτις οὐκ ἀφαιρεθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτῆς). The phrase 'one thing is needful' (ένὸς ἐστιν χρεία) emphasizes singular priority—hearing Jesus' word. Mary 'chose' (έξελέξατο, aorist middle, deliberately selected) 'the good portion' (τὴν ἀγαθὴν μερίδα), echoing Psalm 16:5: 'The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance.' The passive verb 'aphairethēsetai' (ἀφαιρεθήσεται, shall not be taken away) promises permanence—spiritual treasures gained through communion with Christ are eternal, unlike temporal service.

Historical Context

First-century culture assigned domestic responsibilities to women, making Martha's service culturally appropriate and Mary's sitting at Jesus' feet (a posture of discipleship, Acts 22:3) culturally shocking. Rabbis rarely taught women formally. Jesus' affirmation of Mary's choice validated women's capacity for theological learning and spiritual growth, challenging patriarchal limitations. The contrast between Martha's 'distraction' (περιεσπάτο, pulled away) and Mary's focus illustrates competing priorities in discipleship—activism versus contemplation, doing versus being.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' affirmation of Mary challenge the tendency to value activity over attentiveness in spiritual life?
2. What forms of 'much serving' might distract contemporary Christians from the 'one thing needful'?

Interlinear Text

ἐνὸς	δέ	ἐστιν	χρεία·	Μαριά	δέ	τὴν	ἀγαθὴν	μερίδα
one thing	But	is	needful	Mary	But	G3588	that good	part
G1520	G1161	G2076	G5532	G3137	G1161	G18		G3310
ἐξελέξατο	ἵτις	οὐκ	ἀφαιρεθήσεται	ἀπ'	αὐτῆς			
hath chosen	which	not	be taken away	from	her			
G1586	G3748	G3756	G851	G575	G846			

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 27:4 (Parallel theme): One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.

John 4:14 (Parallel theme): But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

John 5:24 (Parallel theme): Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Psalms 73:25 (Parallel theme): Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.

Luke 18:22 (Parallel theme): Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

Psalms 17:15 (Parallel theme): As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

John 17:3 (Parallel theme): And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

Psalms 142:5 (Parallel theme): I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.

Mark 8:36 (Parallel theme): For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

Deuteronomy 30:19 (Parallel theme): I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: