

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
April 15, 2018

Training of Simplicity

Luke10:38-42

10:38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.

10:39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.

10:40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

10:41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things,

10:42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

We set "Training for Godliness" as the goal of the year according the verse of the year; "Rather train yourself for godliness." (1 Timothy 4:7) Today, we will learn about "Simple Life" as a spiritual training for godliness.

1. Managing Possessions

What is "Simple Life?" Firstly, we can say that it is not possession oriented life style.

When you hear the "Simple Life," you might think the life style without joy and is very frugal one. But the "Simple Life" is not "ascetic life" It is definitely not the glamorous life style; however, you can find the joy, which you can not find in the glamorous life. It is

because you receive blessings from God, appreciate it, and feel happiness.

God always gives us what we need. In many cases, He gives us more than what we need. We tend to have unnecessary possessions in order to raise our status and strengthen our security. As a result, the “Simple Life” is destroyed. Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Luke 12:34) The more possessions you have, the more your mind goes there. If you have a leisure car in addition to your daily use car, you have to spend more time and money. If you have the more possessions, your mind will stay away from God.

This is often said. When you have “possessions,” it is important to distinguish “Need” and “Wants” We tend not to think “necessity” Instead, we get “What I want” Consequently, we regret our unnecessary purchase. It would be nice if you repent when you feel regret. However, if you are filled with “Wants” and not satisfied with your possessions, you will want to purchase more and more. This is a “Purchase Addiction” We should be careful.

Our heart will not be satisfied with “possessions.” The only way is faith in God. “Godliness” is our goal for the “Simple Life.” Therefore, the Bible says, “Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment.” (1 Timothy 6:6) Living for godliness means our hearts will be freed from “possessions” and filled with God’s blessings, which is our satisfaction.

In Proverbs, there is a prayer, “Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful

for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God." (Proverbs 30:7-9) The person who said this prayer first seek God. This person could pray, "If I am away from God because of poverty, save me from it. If I am away from God because of rich, please don't give me rich." Godly people can say this with Apostle Paul. "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." (Philippians 4:12) You have freedom which is not controlled by "possessions."

2. Managing Time

I would say for the next, that "simplicity" means to prioritize your time with God.

Time is one of the most important things among gifts from God. When you lose your money, you can earn more again. In contrary, if you lost your time it never comes back. The more you get older, the more important it is how do you spend your time. Here in the States everyone says, "Thank you for your time" after meeting up somebody. We appreciate people's time. I think Americans know the importance of spending time. We should learn our new habits, the good habits to value our own time and their time.

God speaks about our possessions in Malachi 3:8, "Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions." Our possessions are from God, so God may say, "It's all mine." God takes only tithes however, and gives us ninetieth. God entrusted the ninetieth, most of all, to us. I

think He is very generous comparing to our States; He only demands 10% although our States require 21% for corporate tax.

However, God asks us 1/7 or 14.3% of our time. As written in Exodus 20:8-9, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work.” God asks us to spend our time with higher ratio than our properties, because time is important for us. However, He asks our time for ourselves rather than for Himself. As same as our offerings, only tithes of all will come back to us with multiplied good blessings, our time spending with God or for Him will give us sabbath and fill the rest of time with His blessings in return.

The most essential time with God is Sunday worship. When prioritizing this time, our body and soul will be peaceful enough. Many churches begin their worships with “Call to Worship” from the Bible verses. For example, Psalm 100:1-2 “Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!” I think that Matthew 11:28 is also suitable for the call to every Sunday worship. It says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” We shall answer His invitation and gather in worships. We must remind ourselves that we go to worship in order to receive His peace.

In addition to Sunday worship, we need the time of sabbath in a day. If Christians don't have devotional time and don't read the Bible or don't pray, they get stressed out and their bodies, souls, and faith will be reduced, even though their appearance is fine. 1/7 of our time is God's, 1/7 of 24 hours becomes 3 hours. We might have 3 hour devotional time every day. I know it doesn't keep reality. Yet how

about 1/7 of 8 hours without your sleep and working time? 1/7 of 8 hours becomes 1 hour. Can we have 30 minutes in the morning, and 30 minutes at night for Bible reading and prayer? If this is still hard for you, you can do it at 5 or 10 minute break time. If you do it three times or more, you can have at least 30 minute devotional time every day. Our whole life is made by our everyday life. If you keep devotional time everyday, God makes your everyday significant and blesses your whole life.

3. Managing Activities

Thirdly, “a simple life” is the life in which activities are prioritized. Many people are not only greedy for materials but also for activities. They want to try this and that and handle many things at the same time, but they are often stuck with too many agendas and end up not completing a single thing. Believers keep themselves away from indulgent habits, but they are involved in healthy activities. They are sometimes proud of themselves working not only for themselves but also for others and God. Therefore, it makes it harder for them to prioritize their activities. It is easy for us to stop “wrong doing” but we often think “why do we have to stop something good we are doing?” We have to realize that sometimes “good things” can prevent “better things” or “the best thing” to happen.

Today’s verses teach us about these problems. Martha had a visit of Jesus and his disciples and she was distracted with much serving. Martha and Mary were usually close sisters, but Martha was annoyed to see her sister Mary sat at the Jesus’ feet and listened to his teaching. Her anger was directed to Jesus, too. Therefore, Martha interrupted

Jesus' teaching and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

Jesus answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." Of course, Jesus did not reject Martha's serving. He must have been thankful to her. It was good to serve people and it was meaningful for Martha. If she truly felt that, she should have had continued serving. However, she thought Mary should also help her. If Mary truly should help Martha, Jesus would have told her to do so without Martha telling him to say something. So far as Martha welcomed Jesus and once he entered her house, the lord of the house was not Martha but Jesus. However, Martha acted as if she ordered the Lord what to do. She could not understand that Jesus allowed Mary to listen to his teaching, but she vented her feeling to Jesus. Martha went far beyond her territories and distracted herself and she could not concentrate on her own work.

Jesus told Martha, "you are anxious and troubled about many things". The word "troubled" can be translated as "to be upset" or "to be distracted". Whereas Mary concentrated on "one thing" which was to listen to the teaching, Martha was distracted with "many things". If we are also upset and distracted just like Martha, we need to drop "many things" and prioritize our activities to "one thing."

Prioritizing our activities can be done by prioritizing our heart. When our heart is directed toward Jesus or "one thing that is absolutely necessary," we will see what we have to do and we can focus with a calm heart. At the church where my friend serves as a

pastor, they take everything back to the old drawing board once in several years, including all the church meetings, events, activities and volunteer services. Then, church members listen to God's words and pray together, and build a new schedule for church meetings, activities, events, and make a volunteer service sheet. I thought this was a good idea to prioritize and arrange activities. I would propose that everyone arrange and prioritize your activities and focus on "one thing" that is necessary for us.

(Prayer)

Dear Father God, today, we listened to the Lord Jesus telling us, "you are anxious and troubled about many things." We forgot "one thing necessary." To regain it, please prepare our life directed to you and help us focus on the mission you have given to us. Teach us to sit "at the Lord's feet," and help us listen to your guidance there. In the name of the Lord Jesus, we pray, Amen.