

# At His Feet

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Of all the disciples of Christ that pass before us in the Gospel story, perhaps none are more marked by single-hearted devotedness to Christ than Mary of Bethany. She makes nothing of self, but everything of Christ, and hence, on the three occasions that she comes before us, she is found at the feet of Jesus.

We see her first in her sister's home at Bethany, when the Lord of life entered that home and Mary sat at His feet as a *learner* (Luke 10). Later, when death had entered the home, she is found at His feet as a *mourner* (John 11). Lastly, when a few of His loved ones make a supper for the Lord, who had just manifested His resurrection power and glory, she is found at His feet as a *worshipper*.

She not only knew that the Lord was the great Teacher come from God, the One who can sympathise with us in our sorrows, and the Object of our worship, but she had experienced His teaching, tasted His sympathy, and worshipped at His feet.

Good for us if, like the Apostle Paul, we can each say that the desire of the heart is "That I may know Him." We may know much about Christ, but, in order to know Him we must be in His company and, at His feet, learn His mind through His word, taste His sympathy, and in His presence worship and adore.

It is true that the Lord delights to honour the one that puts honour upon Him in the day of His rejection, and has said that wheresoever the gospel is preached the story of Mary shall be told for a memorial of her. But the story of Mary has also been recorded for our profit, for all Scripture is given by God for our instruction. May we then, as we read her story, profit by her lowly and devoted life.

### 1. AT HIS FEET AS A LEARNER Luke 10: 38-42

If, as sinners, we have been at the feet of the Saviour discovering that, in spite of all our sins, He loves us and has died for us, then, if we are to make spiritual progress — if we are to be "meet for the Master's use and prepared unto every good work" — the "one thing needful," as believers, is to take our place at His feet and hear His word.

This plain but important truth is brought before us in the homely scene described in the five closing verses of the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Journeying on His way to Jerusalem, we are told that the Lord came to a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. She gladly opened her home to the Lord, and at once set herself to minister to His bodily needs. This indeed was right and beautiful in its place; and yet the story clearly shows that there was much of self in Martha's service. She did not like to have all the burden of this service, and felt grieved that she was left to serve alone. There was one thing lacking in her service.

The one thing needful — the one thing that Martha missed — was to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His word. She loved the Lord, and with all her energy she zealously set herself to serve the Lord; but her zeal was not according to knowledge. She set herself to work without having first been in the company of the Lord, and in communion with the Lord, and therefore without being instructed in the mind of the Lord through the word of the Lord. As a result she was "distracted with much serving," was "careful and troubled about many things," complaining about her sister, and even entertaining the thought that the Lord was indifferent to her labours.

Alas! do we not, at times, act like Martha, We may take up service according to our own thoughts, or under the direction of others. From morning to night we may busy ourselves in a continual round of activity, and yet neglect the one thing needful — to be alone with the Lord, and in communion with Him hear His word and learn His mind. Little wonder that we get "distracted," and "troubled about many things," and complain of others. How true it is that it is easier to spend whole days in a round of busy service, than half an hour alone with Jesus.

In Mary we see a believer who chose the "good part." Sometimes it is said that Mary chose the better part, as if Martha's part was good, but Mary's was better. It is not thus that the Lord speaks. He definitely says that Mary's part was "that good part," for she chose the "one thing needful" — to sit at His feet and hear His word.

Clearly, then, Mary had a keener perception of the desires of the heart of Christ than her sister. One has said, "Martha's eye saw His weariness, and would give to Him: Mary's faith apprehended His fulness, and would draw from Him."

Martha thought of the Lord only as One who was requiring something from us; Mary discerned that, beyond all the service of which He is so worthy, the desire of His heart, and the great purpose of His coming into this world, was to communicate something to us, "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," and, at the end of His path He could say, "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me" (John 17). By the word of God salvation is brought to us (Acts 13: 26); by the word of God we are born again (1 Peter 1: 23); by the word of God we are cleansed from defilement (John 15: 3); by the word of God we are sanctified (John 17: 17); and by the word of God we are instructed in all the truth of God "that the man of God maybe thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3: 15-17).

May we not say that Martha set herself to do good works without having been thoroughly furnished by the word of God. In Mary we learn that communion with Christ, and instruction in the word of Christ must precede all service that is acceptable to Christ. He delights that, in His own time and way, we should minister to Him; but, above all, He delights to have us in His company that He may minister to us.

Mary chose this good part and the Lord will not allow any complaints by her sister to belittle her choice — it shall not be taken from her. So, again, in the last days of the Church's history on earth, the Lord commends the Philadelphians, not for any great activity that would give them a prominent place before the world, but that they had "kept His word." Like Mary of old they set greater store on His word than their works. It is not, indeed, that Mary was without works, for having chosen "that good part," in due time the Lord commends her for doing "a good work" (Matthew 26: 10). So with the Philadelphian saints, the Lord who commended them for keeping His word, is the One who can say "I know thy works."

Of old Moses could say of the LORD, "Yea, He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand; and they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words" (Deut. 33: 3). This presents a lovely picture of the true position of God's people — held in the hand of the Lord; sitting at the feet of

the Lord, and listening to the words of the Lord. Secure in His hand; at rest at His feet; and learning His mind. May we, then, choose this good part, and in due course do the good work.

## 2. AT HIS FEET AS A MOURNER John 11: 32

In the touching scene described in the eleventh chapter of John, we again hear of the two sisters, Martha and Mary. Sickness had ended in death casting its shadow over the home. Their brother has been taken from them.

In their trouble they rightly turn to the Lord as their unfailing resource, and very blessedly they plead His love for their brother, for they say, "He whom thou lovest is sick." This, indeed, was true, the Lord loved Lazarus, but we are also told that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." And as the story proceeds we are permitted to see the way love takes in order to declare, on the one hand, the glory of the Son of God, and, on the other, the compassions of the heart of Jesus.

Further, we again see the difference between these two devoted women. Martha who, on the former occasion, had been cumbered with her service when the Lord of life and glory had visited her house, is now restless and distracted when death has come into the home. Mary who, in the former day, had listened to His word, can now quietly wait for Him to speak and act. Thus we read, "Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him: but Mary sat still in the house." When, however, she received the word, "The Master is come and calleth for thee," she at once acts in obedience to the word, for we read, "She arose quickly, and came unto Him."

"Then when Mary had come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet." For the second time this devoted woman is found in the lowly place at the feet of Jesus. The Jews, mistaking her action, say, "She goeth unto the grave to weep there." She was doing that which is far better, that which faith alone can do; she was going to the feet of Jesus to *weep there*. To weep at the grave of a loved one even the world can do, but it brings no comfort to the sorrowing heart. But to weep at the feet of Jesus is to find the comfort of His love, for we weep at the feet of One who, in His own time, can raise our dead, and, in the meantime, can comfort our hearts. So it came to pass that Mary, who had been at His feet as a learner is now found at His feet as a mourner.

It is noticeable that in this touching scene there is no record of any word spoken by the Lord to Mary. This only we learn that, in the presence of her great sorrow, "Jesus wept."

The Jews wrongly interpret these tears as being a token of the Lord's love for Lazarus. He did indeed love Lazarus, but there was no need to weep for one that He was about to raise from the dead. It was the sorrow of the living that drew forth the tears of Jesus, as we read, "When Jesus saw her weeping . . . He grieved in spirit and was troubled," and His trouble found vent in tears, for "Jesus wept."

In the days of old we read of Jehovah that, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Ps. 147: 3). In order to heal the broken-hearted He became flesh, and shed His tears to dry ours, and broke His heart to bind up our hearts.

And Jesus is still the same — "The same yesterday, today, and for ever." In our sorrows, and when our loved ones are taken from us, we still learn that our only real and lasting comfort is found in bowing at His feet, and pouring out our sorrow in the presence of the One who once wept with these broken-hearted women.

### 3. AT HIS FEET AS A WORSHIPPER John 12

The beautiful scene that passes before us in the beginning of the twelfth chapter of John, takes place just six days before the cross. The Lord's devoted life, in which self was ever set aside to serve others in love, draws to its close. At every step of His path He had been dispensing blessing — spreading a feast, as it were, for all the world. Now, at last, a few of His loved ones make a feast for Him, as we read, "There they made Him a supper."

Christ was in this needy world as a Giver, but it was not often that anyone gave to Him. Once, in the beginning of His way, a few wise men "presented unto Him gifts" and had fallen down and "worshipped Him." Now, at the end of His path, they make a supper for Him and, again, one is found at His feet with her gifts as a worshipper.

Truly, too, there had been a moment when Levi had made Him "a great feast in his own house." There the Lord had sat down with "a great company of publicans and others" in order to dispense blessing to sinners. Now He sits down in company with a few of His own in order to receive the homage of saints.

Christ is the One for Whom they make the supper — the centre of the feast and the Object before every heart. Lazarus, and others, are present, but, we read, they "sat at the table *with Him*." The supper was *for Him*, and the guests were "*with Him*." The blessedness, and the greatness, of the occasion was that He, the Son of God, was present.

Again, the two sisters, Martha and Mary, are present. Martha serves, but no longer is she cumbered with her service, or complaining of others. She thinks only of the One for whom they had made the supper. For the third time Mary is found at the feet of the Lord, but no longer to receive His words and His sympathy, but to give to Him the worship of a heart that loved Him, for Mary's gifts, Mary's acts, and Mary's attitude, all breathe the spirit of worship.

Drawn by attachment of heart to Christ she had sat at His feet, listened to His words and learned something of His mind. Now we see that affection for Christ is the secret of all true service. Moved by this love for Christ she does the right thing at the right moment. She might have left the ointment in the alabaster box and presented it to Christ, but this would not have put the same honour upon Christ. She pours it out upon His feet. She does *the right act* She might, at some earlier moment in the Lord's life, have anointed His feet with the ointment, but she waits until the hour of His going to the cross and the grave has arrived. Moved by the instincts of love she does the right act *at the right moment*, as the Lord can say, "Against the day of my burying hath she kept this." Christ was everything to Mary. Christ was her life, and all that she has is devoted to Him. The costly ointment, and the hair of her head — the glory of a woman — are used to put honour upon Christ. She is not even praising Him for all that He had done, or was about to do, but she bows at His feet as a worshipper because of *all that He is*.

Thus acting she puts honour upon the One that the world had rejected and was about to nail to a cross. She forgets herself, and her blessings, and thinks only of Christ. How blessed, if, when we make Him a supper, in a like spirit of worship we could each one pass out of sight of ourselves, and our blessings, and see no man any more save Jesus only and His glory.

Thus acting we should, like Mary in her day, be misunderstood by the world, and even by many true disciples, but we should, also like Mary, have the approval of the Lord. In the eyes of the world her act was mere waste. So in Christendom today, Christianity is viewed merely as a system for making the world a better and a brighter place. The one great aim is to benefit man; all else is waste. In one parable the Lord likens the Kingdom of Heaven to "a certain King that made a wedding feast for His Son." In

the spirit of this parable the disciples had made a supper for the Lord, and Mary had put honour upon Christ. And though the world may condemn, the Lord approves for He says, "Let her alone," and again, in another gospel, He can say, "She hath wrought a good work upon Me." Indeed, so highly does the Lord appreciate Mary's act that He adds, "Wheresoever this gospel is preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matthew 26: 13).

Moreover, the Lord can say, "Me ye have not always." It will be our privilege and our joy to worship Him in glory, but it was Mary's privilege, and it is still ours, to worship Him in the world where He is rejected, and in the face of scorn and reproach of men. Mary seized the occasion to render to Him this precious service. As one has said, "She never could have recalled it in eternity . . . Love will find new ways of expressing itself to Him then. But it will not be what He looks for from us now. There will be no self to be denied, no cross to be borne, no world to be surrendered, no reproach to be encountered then."

How blessed, too, was the effect of her act of devotion to Christ, for we read, "the house was filled with the odour of the ointment." Lazarus may hold sweet communion with Christ, and Martha may serve Christ, but Mary's act of worship, that was so precious to the heart of Christ, was also a joy to all that were in the house. That which gives honour to Christ will bring blessing to others.

We may rightly commune with Christ about many things, we may rightly serve Him in many ways, but the worship that makes everything of Christ will surpass all else in the day when we make Him a supper. So will it be in that great day when all the redeemed are gathered home. The new song will be sung, that renders praise to the Lord for all that He has done. Heaven and earth will join to celebrate His glory, but, above all we read of those who "fell down and worshipped Him." Beyond all the mighty work that He has done, and beyond all the glory that He has acquired, *He will be worshipped because of all that He is*. Then we shall be able to say,

The heart is satisfied; can ask no more;  
All thought of self is now for ever o'er:  
Christ, its unmingled Object, fills the heart  
In blest adoring love — its endless part.