



## **SITTING AT HIS FEET**

What would be your favourite place in the world?

There could be any number of answers, depending on a person's likes, dislikes, and how they're wired up. But as we'll see today, the best place is actually a very privileged place.

The most privileged place of all, in fact:

### **Luke 10:38-42**

The expression 'to sit at someone's feet' is an ancient one, and has its origins in the OT – in the book of Deuteronomy, to be precise. In Deuteronomy 33:3, Israel is said to have received the *Torah*, the Law of Moses, while sitting at the feet of? God Himself.

In a similar way, Mary of Bethany is depicted as sitting at the feet of Jesus. What does Luke mean by that?

He's describing 3, very important, things:

**1) A place of resting.** Martha is busy, busy, busy - on the go as usual – whereas Mary is content to sit at the feet of Jesus. Now in Jewish culture, Mary would have been expected to be helping Martha in the kitchen, preparing food for the men; so technically, she has been 'distracted' from what she should have been doing. And yet, Luke turns the situation on its head and says it's Martha who is being distracted, not Mary.

What has Martha been distracted from?

From spending time with Jesus.

Distractions can come all too easily. And in all shapes and sizes, too. Work, school, leisure; TV, PC, smartphone; family, friends, self. Even in the context of ministry, it can happen (just ask the average pastor).

Now this is not an excuse for laziness, joylessness, or even neglect. But it is a reminder that we need to take some time out and sit at the feet of our Rabbi; to just be still. Jesus would spend time each day with His Father, and He encouraged His disciples to do the same, with Him (e.g. Mark 6:31). For Jesus, that usually meant early in the morning. Now that may not be the ' stillest' time of the day for you (especially if you've got young children. If I remember rightly, children + early mornings do not = stillness!).

But whenever / however it happens, we need to make sure it does.

Our relationship with Jesus depends on it.

**2) A place of feasting.** Look at Jesus' response to Martha in vs41-42. Translating from the Greek, Jesus actually says, "Mary has chosen the best portion." The Greek word for 'portion', *merida*, can mean in the sense of food. Given the context, perhaps what Jesus is saying is, "Martha, Martha, you spend so much of your time worrying about this meal and that. But Mary has chosen the best meal of all. And it will not be taken from her."

What's the meal? Vs39 tells us: Mary was "sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to His words."

The idea of comparing God's word to food is not uncommon; in fact, you can find it dotted throughout the Bible. E.g. Deuteronomy 8:3 (and quoted by Jesus) says "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." Job 23:12 says: "I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread."

The reason is this:

We're in trouble without it.

Just as we need the nutrients contained in our food, so we need the nutrients contained in His word. For life and health and vitality. If the only time you get fed – the only time you open up a Bible – is here, then it's "Houston, we have a problem." Imagine if, next year, I suddenly announce, "Hey everyone: for Lent this year we're going to give up eating for 40 days – apart from brunch on a Sunday!" Would that be wise? No. And yet that's what so many of us do, on a spiritual level. One meal a week is not enough. We need to sit at the feet of Jesus.

On saying all that, we are not just fed to get fat. We are fed to feed others – which leads onto the final point:

**3) A place of training.** To 'sit at a Rabbi's feet' was a technical Jewish expression – it meant to receive rabbinic training, as a Rabbi's *talmid* or

disciple. E.g. in the Greek text of Acts 22:3 the Apostle Paul says, "I sat at the feet of Gamaliel", which means he was a student of Rabbi Gamaliel I, one of the greatest rabbinic scholars of his day. The exact same phrase is used here.

Now what Mary was doing was nothing short of revolutionary – and sadly still is, in some places. No Rabbi ever had female disciples, with the exception of one: Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, many ancient Rabbis taught that such a thing should never, *ever* be done. Another 1<sup>st</sup> century Rabbi, Eliezer ha-Gadol, said this:

*"Instructing a woman in Torah is like teaching her blasphemy ... let the Torah be burned rather than be entrusted to a woman."*

(So now you ladies know where you would have stood with Rabbi Eliezer.)

Jesus, as usual, is turning the world upside down, and training Mary as? One of His disciples. And that's more than just listening to a sermon on a Sunday morning (or Saturday, in their case). She's being prepared for service, for action, for leadership. So what Martha was really saying was, "Rabbi, are You blind? Tell my sister to get up and help me, where she's supposed to be, not sitting with Your disciples, where she's not supposed to be. That's a man's place – not a woman's!"

And Jesus, in effect, says "No."

And what is true of Mary is true of us all – men, and women. We are all Bible students and have all enrolled as Jesus' disciples.

Jesus is preparing us *all* for ministry.

### **Time To Sit**

To wrap things up today, let's think about our own lives, for a moment. Are we setting aside the time to rest; to feast; to train?

Some of us here, we need to look at our workload and learn the art of just 'being.' Some of us, we need to make the Bible more a part of our lives and learn to meditate on it – turn it over in our heads. And some of us, we need to be putting the theory into practice, living this stuff and sharing it with others. If I'm honest, I can struggle with some of these things myself, sometimes (as I said, ask the average pastor). I'll leave it to you and Jesus to decide which category you might fall into.

However you interpret it, may we all, this week, make time to sit at the feet of Jesus.

The *best* place to be.