

Posture and Priority

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Date: 01 November 2015

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[0 : 00] O Lord, our gracious God, we give you thanks for partnership in the Gospel. We thank you for bringing us together in communion this day.

Again, this evening in Gospel Fellowship, we thank you that we can come under your word. We pray that you would speak to us this evening through the Gospel grant us. We pray to be receptive. We pray that we would be sensitive to your voice, your still small voice as it speaks grant us to be good listeners.

We pray that you would speak to us as a corporate body, as a fellowship. We also pray that you would speak to us as individuals. Remember us without individual needs.

We pray that your word would speak to us in a particular way this night. And so we would come before you giving thanks that you invite us to come.

[1 : 18] And that at your feet we will find rest. And so we pray that you would draw near, glorify your name, do us good for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Well, turn with me please if you will to Luke chapter 10. Luke 10 and we are going to consider this evening the words of verse 39, Luke 10, 39.

Martha had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. I'd like us to think about two things.

Posture and priority. There's much we can learn from both Mary and Martha. We're going to focus on Mary in particular tonight.

So let's begin by looking at what Luke tells us about her posture and why posture matters. About five years ago I was bothered with a recurring lower back problem.

[2 : 55] I went to the doctor and I was referred to a physiotherapist. And then I went through six weeks of grueling physiotherapy. The one thing that my physiotherapist kept saying to me is mind your posture because posture matters.

And I believe that Luke is trying to convey that point to us this evening as he profiles Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus.

We're going to explore the symbolic significance of this moment in Bethany, the point at which Mary adopts the posture of discipleship.

We see Mary here as a servant in submission. And I want to begin by saying that for every disciple, for every follower of Jesus, this is the key place of learning at the master's feet.

There's much we can glean from Mary's example. So let's begin by just spending some time looking at what Luke unfolds.

[4 : 14] Verse 39, we are told that Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to his teaching. Jesus has Mary's undivided attention as she listens attentively to his words.

Interesting, isn't it, that for Mary time is off the essence. Sometimes we say that when we're in a hurry. Mary goes apart, she makes time for Jesus and she will spend time with Jesus.

For Mary, nothing else matters. Everything goes on hold. Everything can wait as she waits on the Lord.

Mary effectively gives her heart to Christ and she wishes to have her heart filled with Christ. For Mary, all of her domestic chores at this point pale into all insignificance.

Just for a precious moment as she sits and absorbs the words of Jesus, Mary knows that this is a window of opportunity and this window is going to close very, very quickly, very soon Jesus will move on.

[5 : 45] And so Mary's life grinds to a halt so that she can spend time with her Savior. So where better to be sitting than sitting at the feet of the Lord Jesus in our Christian lives, adopting the posture of discipleship?

What of your posture this evening? Posture matters. Mary is waiting with expectation upon Jesus. She is focused on Him. Some of us may be asking, how can I do that? How do I sit at the feet of Jesus in my Christian life?

Well, by following the example of Mary, an open Bible matters. And with an open Bible, under the guidance of the Gospel writers, you and I can be taken to the feet of Jesus.

When did we last read the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? I want to say to you that if you're prepared to do that on a regular basis, you will discover that the Gospel writers will usher you to the feet of Jesus.

[7 : 21] As you and I read the Gospels, we discover that we gravitate towards Jesus Christ.

Immediately, in an instant, it's that quick. Because when you actually start to read the Gospels, let me illustrate, when you read Matthew's Gospel, you begin at chapter one, of course.

How does it begin? Well, Matthew begins with these words, the book of the genealogy of who? Jesus Christ. And then you continue and you read Mark's Gospel and Mark cuts to the chase and his introductory sentence goes as follows.

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Luke takes a little longer to get there, but let's not miss the point.

Luke begins in the days of Herod. Mary gave birth to her firstborn son. He takes us to Bethlehem.

[8 : 36] What about John? Well, John, not at Bethlehem, but in eternity. John begins in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

Do you get the point? The Gospels revolve around Christ Jesus. The focal point, the centre of gravity is always the person, work, mission and ministry of Jesus.

And as we read the Gospels before you know it, you too are at the feet of Luke's Saviour, Christ, the Lord, no less.

We run Christianity Explored, we do so on a recurring basis at back. And if you're familiar with Christianity Explored, you know where I'm coming from.

When I say that this is the logic behind Christianity Explored, you go through Mark's Gospel and you explore, as Rico Tice puts it so well, the life of the person at the heart of the Christian faith, Jesus Christ.

[9 : 56] And you see from Mark's perspective, we ask the questions that we are encouraged to ask as we explore the Christian faith with an open Bible at Mark's Gospel, who was Jesus, why did he come, what is involved in following him.

Perhaps some of us are asking questions like that this evening. Last Sunday was Bible Sunday. The Scottish Bible Society encouraged us all to recognise Bible Sunday, a day on which churches, the world over, were encouraged to celebrate the continuing impact of the Bible on individuals and communities across Scotland and throughout the world.

Bible Sunday matters, but so does Bible Monday and Bible Tuesday and Bible Wednesday. Regular, disciplined, daily Bible reading matters.

So I want to encourage you to engage with your Bible because you see, when we're prepared to engage with the Bible, that equates to a personal engagement with the Lord Jesus.

We are sitting at his feet. You see, an open Bible is an opening for God the Holy Spirit to fulfil his ministry.

[11 : 33] Remember the words of Jesus in John 16, 14, as he speaks of the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, He, the Spirit, will glorify me for He will take what is mine and He will declare it to you.

He will do that for you and I as we read through Genesis, as we plow through Leviticus. He will do that. He will reveal Jesus to us as we go through the sacrificial system.

He will reveal to us our prophet, our priest, our king, Jesus. He will take us to his feet.

Some of you might remember the late Alan Redpath. He was an English evangelist and he spoke on a number of occasions on the theme of radical discipleship.

He once advised a Christian to wreck, to ruin her Bible every 10 years. You might say that's a bit extreme. But his philosophy was that a well-worn Bible equates to a well-fed soul.

[12 : 52] And so it does. Remember the words of Paul to the church at Colossae, Colossians 3.16, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

The word there to dwell is to live. That gives it a different dynamic, doesn't it? Let the word of Christ live in you.

Let's look at some alternative words too richly. It would go like this. Let the word of Christ live in you in full measure.

Let the word of Christ live in you in abundance. But the reality is that I am to live.

If I understand anything about the principle of discipleship, then I will take my Bible seriously. No half measures. But in full measure I will engage with my Bible.

[13:55] I will live out God's word. I will be this evening not merely a hearer of His word, but a proactive doer.

Because I believe that faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ, not just on a Sunday, but on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

When we come, for example, to our midweek prayer meeting or our meetings for prayer in all kinds of contexts, perhaps house groups, you have city groups and so on.

But when we come, we sit at the feet of Jesus. I say that to you because He is there waiting for you and I.

It's a good region to come, isn't it? Jesus is there waiting for you. And through His word, as you come into fellowship with like-minded individuals, as you meet with God's people, with other Christians in prayer, there you and I meet Him.

[15:25] There we are at His feet. That's why I do corporate prayer. Can you say that this evening? Do you get it?

That's why I prioritise church. That's why it matters to me. That's why I recognise its fundamental importance.

That's what drives me to go. Did we come here this evening in obligation? Are we box-ticking? Or did we come here in anticipation?

Did we resolve to come here within the walls of this building? Can we say from previous experiences of being in corporate prayer, as you have been over the past seven days, can you say in relation to your particular group, can you say with respect to corporate prayer, can we say this evening one and all, that there have been times where I, just like Mary, I have sat at the Lord's feet and I have listened to His teaching.

Do you know what? I'm going to do the same this coming week again. Because we often discover that this is my Bethany.

[17:00] Times when we have sat at the feet of Jesus, perhaps as some of you look back over the past seven days, you can recall just perhaps just moments, special moments when you felt that you were sitting at His feet.

Perhaps times when you've been reading your Bible and God's Spirit has revealed Jesus to you in a particular way and you find yourself sitting where Mary is sitting.

Perhaps some of us tonight, I don't know very much about you, but perhaps what I'm going to say to you, what I've said to my own folk back and back.

Trying not to say that again is very confusing. If I'm not as committed as I could be and should be, if I have something of the Martha syndrome in me, I will, from this day forth, I pledge to make it my priority to be there, because I know that Jesus is there and He is waiting for me to come to Him.

I've met Him there before. I've had fellowship with Him there before. I've had fellowship with others who share my longing to experience His presence.

[18:39] That's why I need to spend time at the feet of Jesus, because it's there that I get my perspective back. It's there that I am spiritually realigned and restored, and so posture matters.

You know, there's a wonderful passage of Scripture in its first Thessalonians 4.17. Paul, he's speaking of how, for the believer, the best is yet to unfold, the best is yet to come.

And as he speaks of the last things and of how it's all going to crystallise, we're going to be sitting at the feet of Jesus throughout the endless ages of eternity in heaven.

In Emanuel's land, Paul says, he's making a distinction between the here and now and heaven, and so Paul says, we will always be with the Lord at His feet.

We will never be without end, with a perpetual posture of worship. Bethany is a snapshot of what is to come.

[20:07] But there, there will be no parting benediction. There will be no farewell. Remember the words of John 14 as that chapter ends, Jesus says to his disciples, arise, let us go from here.

These words will never be uttered in heaven. Sitting at the feet of Jesus, posture matters. Let's go on and focus on priority.

Because Luke's profile of Mary is interesting because we can't help but compare and contrast. We see that Mary is different to Martha. Martha's preoccupied, we're told, that she's distracted with much serving, anxious and troubled about many things.

Does that suggest that Mary was not anxious, that Mary was not troubled about anything, that things were going swimmingly for Mary? No, it does not. The difference is that Mary had, I believe, her own personal concerns and troubles, but she prioritises.

She brings all of her troubles to the feet of Jesus. Do we have anxieties and troubles tonight? I'm sure we do. Some of us perhaps are bottling in issues in our lives that we feel we just can't share with anybody else around us.

[21 : 37] Perhaps we're anxious about what tomorrow might bring, what the future holds. But we are encouraged here to bring them all, all that stuff to the feet of the Lord Jesus, because Jesus is waiting for you and I to do precisely that.

Perhaps there are particular sins in our lives that are shortcomings. We've been somewhat wayward. Jesus is saying, come to me, learn from me, come to my feet. I will restore you.

I will give you rest. I love these words from, I believe from a hymn. I can't tell you who wrote these words.

Perhaps you know, but I read them recently and I'd like to share them with you. When in the midst of life with its problems bent with our toil and burdens we bear wonderful thought and deep consolation, Jesus is always there.

He is here. Jesus, the Jesus who walked in Bethany, who sat in Mary and Martha's home, he is here this evening.

[23 : 03] And he is saying to each and every one of us, all you who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest. Come as Mary did.

So question, where are we sitting tonight? Are we sitting at the feet of Jesus, or are we some feet away from Jesus?

I once knew an individual who, he was a very keen driver, I always loved to be behind the wheel. I couldn't tolerate being the passenger. Maybe you're that kind of person.

Or maybe you know that kind of individual, he just always likes to be behind the wheel. I think that there are people like that.

They're not sitting at the feet of Jesus. They are behind the steering wheel of their own destiny. I'll do it my way.

[24 : 02] Mary or Martha, we read that Mary chose well. Mary chose the good portion, as Luke highlights here in verse 42.

And Luke is making the point that choices in life do matter. Jesus, I believe, is alluding here to Old Testament passages, like the passage we read in Psalm 119, where the greatest possession that you and I can have in life is a close, personal, intimate fellowship with the Lord.

So that the Lord is one's portion in one's life. The words of Psalm 16, the words of Psalm 119, verse 57, the Lord is my portion.

I promise to keep your words. I turn my feet to your testimonies and so on.

Some of you may have heard of the missionary Jonathan Goforth, 1859 to 1936.

[25 : 20] He once spoke in a chapel in southern China, and someone asked him, Jonathan, I've heard you speak three times, and you always have the same theme.

You always speak of Jesus Christ. Why? And the missionary Goforth replied, Sir, before answering your question, let me ask, what did you have for your dinner today?

Rice replied the man. What did you have yesterday? Goforth asked. Well, he said, rice. And what do you expect tomorrow?

Rice, of course, it's my stapled eye. It gives me strength. I can't possibly live without it. Sir, and the man hesitated for a moment. He said to Goforth, Sir, it's my very life.

And Goforth responded quickly, and he said, sir, what you have said of rice, Jesus is to my soul. He is my staple diet. He is my strength.

[26 : 33] I cannot live without him. He is my very life. Can you say that this evening? Can you say, oh Lord Jesus, you are to me my cup and portion, sure.

It's personal, isn't it? But when it comes to the personal, we see that there are two very different people who have two very different attitudes to Jesus when we read Luke 10, and as we compare Mary and Martha, Mary is committed to serving.

Her sister, Martha, is distracted with much serving. There's an irony there. One is dedicated and devoted to Jesus. The other is preoccupied and somewhat sidetracked.

One is absorbed in the Savior. The other is self-absorbed. So Mary and Martha's home, it paints a picture of two people who have different, contrasting attitudes to Jesus.

So I know this question has been asked a thousand times. Are you a Mary? Are you a Martha? I'd like to ask an alternative question. Am I committed or am I distracted in my Christian life?

[27 : 51] Look at verse 38. What's really interesting about this narrative is that it's Martha who welcomes Jesus onto the domestic scene.

So you might say, well, in principle, she gets off to a good start, but it doesn't take long to discover that she's not as focused on her esteemed guest as she should be. Verse 40, she quickly becomes, Luke tells us, distracted with much serving.

Look at saying, literally, that Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. And there is the irony.

Look at saying that what Martha didn't realize was that in her somewhat misguided enthusiasm and overwhelming desire to serve her guest and to prepare for his needs, she was in reality neglecting her guest, overlooking her guest's needs.

She is so busy in doing things for Jesus that she is not spending any time with Jesus.

[29 : 05] She is a distracted Christian. Is there a message there for you and I this evening? That's what I think sometimes when the Bible highlights this subtle danger.

That we should all be sensitive to. Because we can all be involved in all kinds of Christian activities and service with good motives, but at the same time, we too can be personally detached from serving Christ.

Martha's distracted Christianity is all too common. Engaged in doing things for Christ at the expense of not spending enough time with my Christ.

I once knew someone who, he was a bit of a conference goer, shall we say. Didn't miss a thing. He did kind of a circuit. He would go to conferences, he would go to seminars, he would go to communion services, he went everywhere.

He lived, you know, for that kind of thing. But you know that some years later he said to me, I did all of that, but it was at the expense of a lack of personal devotion to Jesus Christ.

[30 : 45] He says, I may not have missed a conference or a seminar, but what was lacking was personal communion with my Saviour Jesus Christ.

Distracted with much attending, distracted with much serving. There's an irony in all of that.

If you were to ask Derek and I, how many sermons do you prepare in a year? Probably several hundred. And that's with an open Bible.

You might say, well, that's a great place to be. But there's no halo, is there?

Because you see, if sermon preparation about Jesus Christ, if that's all I do, without a personal devotion to Christ, without a personal prayerful Bible reading strategy in my personal life, then as Paul says, without the love of Jesus Christ burning in my heart, I gain nothing.

[32 : 13] Are you sitting at the feet of Jesus as a congregation, as a fellowship this evening? Where should our strategies for evangelism and mission and outreach begin at the feet of Jesus?

Where should our strategies remain and be maintained at the feet of Jesus? And as we want to take our vision for the Gospel to another level, where should that take place at the feet of Jesus? Committed or distracted? You remember in the Old Testament, God, he speaks of a disobedient Israel.

In Isaiah 29, 13, a distracted people, God says, come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

There are times when we would do well to examine ourselves. Perhaps in the workplace, you're no stranger to self-assessment, to filling in forms about evaluation and performance and so on.

[33 : 47] There's something to be said for reviewing our Christian lives, isn't there, and revising if necessary. Posture, priority, time for and with Jesus.

I want to conclude by leaving with you the words of Daniel O. Teasley. I want to quote these words. I hope that these words will challenge both you and I. At a personal level, corporately, I hope these words resonate with each and every one of us.

Have you any time for Jesus? Can it be life's journey through that you have no time to serve Him, who has spent his life for you, time for business, time for pleasure, time to revel on in sin?

Will you not take time for Jesus? Oh, invite Him to come in. If you have no time for Jesus, ere you pass beyond the blue in the resurrection morning, He will have no time for you.

[35 : 18] Amen. Shall we bow our heads in prayer? O Lord, our great God and great King, grant us a spirit of submission so that we will sit and indeed anchor ourselves at the feet of Jesus.

We give you thanks that over the past seven days, your people here have sat at the feet of the Lord Jesus.

We give thanks that we have a great mediator, and when we bring our prayerful petitions in the name of Jesus, we give thanks that the very God in whom we live move and have our very existence hears us and answers us.

So hear our prayers and grant us this evening to pledge that we will spend more time at the feet of our Saviour so that we will have the posture of discipleship wherever we find ourselves within our homes, within our work stations, within our communities, we pray, O God, that you would give us to prioritize and to make time for Jesus.

Amen.