

THE BEST PLACE IN THE World- At the Feet of Jesus
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WORLD ... at the feet of Jesus (MATTHEW 15:30)

"The eye of the needle" was the small gate built into the large gates of Jerusalem. Probably, the Lord had seen a camel-eer striving desperately to squeeze his camel through the narrow opening. First, all the baggage had to be removed; then the animal was commanded to kneel and be persuaded to pass through the small aperture. It was a difficult and complicated maneuver, but a determined traveler often accomplished the challenging task. Every listener understood what Christ meant when He said: ". . . It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24).

Proud citizens refused to kneel before Christ. It was almost impossible for them to off-load their treasures and advance on their knees into the kingdom of God! That, apparently, was an art few people acquired. Men are tallest when they kneel at the feet of the Savior. Certain texts considered together provide an interesting progression of thought.

Peter Fell Down. . . The Place of Conviction (Luke 5:8)

Simon Peter never forgot the morning when the Savior walked toward him on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. With increasing interest he watched the approaching crowd, but when the Stranger stepped into the empty boat, took a seat, and asked Peter to row the boat away from the shore, he probably smiled and did as Jesus had asked. It was the first time his fishing boat had been used as a pulpit.

It is not known whether or not he attended the synagogue services; perhaps his occupation left little time for religious activities. That morning Peter heard the greatest sermon he had ever heard. Its content has never been disclosed, but it may be safely assumed, as it continued, Simon became increasingly agitated. The writers of the Gospels never revealed how long Jesus spoke, but when the unique seaside service terminated, Simon was asked to go to deeper water and prepare to catch fish.

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Peter's admiration for the Preacher was never in doubt, but what had been requested seemed foolish since the fishermen had worked all the night without success. Nevertheless, he had no desire to displease the Stranger, so he replied: "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy wont I will let down the net" (Luke 5:5). Peter committed an expensive mistake. He was told to let down his nets. The fish which should have been in two, three or four nets, went into the one which immediately commenced to break. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

It is important to remember Peter caught the fish after he had heard the Savior's sermon. To use the proverbial saying: "It was the last straw which broke the camel's back!" Probably Simon was seated behind the Lord, but as he skillfully handled the boat, Christ's message convicted him. He remembered things he had done and said, and guilt overwhelmed his soul as he said: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." It is impossible to hear the Gospel of Christ without being troubled by a sense of unworthiness.

Zacchaeus Came Down. . . The Place of Contrition
(Luke 19:6)

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The story of Zacchaeus is one of the most intriguing in the New Testament. It was written: "He sought to see Jesus who he was. . . ." It appears to be incomprehensible that after three and a half years of Christ's amazing ministry, there remained a man unaware of the identity and personality of Jesus of Nazareth. (1) Was the tax-gatherer so isolated from his fellow Jews that he had remained ignorant of events within the nation? (2) Was this an unusual commotion in Jericho when, unexpectedly, people thronged the streets? Did Zacchaeus emerge from his office asking, "What is the cause of this disturbance?" Maybe he had heard about the miracle-worker from Nazareth, and hearing He was near, became anxious to see Him. He was very diminutive, and to gain a better view, climbed into a sycamore tree. The low-lying branches enabled him to find a suitable vantage point. Zacchaeus was the chief tax-gatherer in Jericho, and it is

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believed his position was exploited to increase personal wealth. Perhaps, unlike Peter, he was self-righteous. Curiosity helped him climb the tree, but concern brought him back to the street. Zacchaeus, who had never heard the Savior, looked into the Lord's face, and heard: "Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house." He was detested by the Pharisees, but their contempt was meaningless. He realized that Jesus knew him, loved him, and desired a welcome into his home.

It may be significant that the man did not say: "Lord, the half of my goods I will give to the poor -, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation I will restore him fourfold." It would appear from the text that this had already been his common practice; that he was fair, honorable and just. That may or may not have been the case, but at least it may be said his testimony would be attractive to people who advertise their personal virtue. The view from the feet of Jesus is infinitely better than any seen from a tree!

The Palsied Man Was Let Down... The Place of Conversion (Luke 5:19)

Blessed is the man whose friends desire to bring him to Christ. "And behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus." Webster's Dictionary describes palsy as being: "paralysis of any part of the body sometimes accompanied with involuntary tremors." The shaking palsy was "A chronic degenerative disease of the central nervous system characterized by tremors, muscular rigidity, weakness, and a masklike expression." His condition and experience can be summarized under four headings.

(1) He was sick. His disease had reached vital parts of his body; he had become helpless and hopeless; there was no known cure for his ailment. Jesus said the cause of his condition was sin, but, apparently, the sufferer was either ignorant of that fact, or had forgotten it.

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(2) He was sure. Carried by four of his friends, the man approached the building in which Jesus was speaking, but the size of the audience made a normal entry impossible. Undaunted, his carriers ascended steps to the roof to remove the tiles. The owner of the building would become annoyed that his property had been damaged, but the sick man believed he would

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be able to assume responsibility for repairs.

(3) He was surprised. When the Lord said: "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee," the most amazed man in the place was the suppliant. He had not come seeking forgiveness, but to be healed! Yet, Jesus affirmed the cause of his ailment was previously committed sin. Having dealt with the cause of the trouble, it became easy for Christ to remove its effect.

(4) He was saved. The man's life was transformed; his pain was replaced by peace; paralysis by praise; helplessness by happiness. Everything changed when he reached the feet of Jesus.

The Father Kneeled Down... The Place of Concern
(Mart. 17:14)

"And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, Lord have mercy on my son: for he is a lunatic and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him" (Mart. 17:14-16).

The father was desperate; he had exhausted his resources. Every person in the community believed his son was possessed by a demon, and avoided contact with the family. The lad needed constant attention and it was recognized his unpredictable actions could cause death.

Apparently, the grieving parent had no physical ailments, but his boy's condition was heart-breaking. He yearned for the lad's deliverance, and this became evident when he knelt with uplifted arms before Christ. The man had overcome doubt and disappointment, for while Jesus had been on the Mount of Transfiguration, his boy had been brought to the disciples. Those self-confident men laid their hands on the stricken child; they

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failed to expel the demon. It would be difficult to describe the disappointment of the father who expected much, but received nothing. Nevertheless, he was not without hope; his faith was centered in Christ. Followers of Christ may fail ignominiously, but the Savior continues to perform the impossible. He succeeds when all others fail.

Mary Sat Down ... The Place of Contentment (Luke 10:39)

"Now it came to pass, as they went, that Jesus entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word" (Luke 10:38-39). The devoted family in Bethany provided interesting contrasts. Lazarus, the head of the household, was not an aggressive character. Apart from his being raised from the dead, little would be known about him. He was quiet, dependable and loyal. When his sisters asked Jesus for assistance, they said: "Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick" (John 11:3). Martha was the leader in the family; she made the decisions, and apparently was never challenged. She invited the Lord to enter her home. Martha usually completed a task before others could begin!

Mary was contemplative, a dreamer, who traveled far while sitting still! She looked into the eyes of Jesus and saw the heart of God! Martha was industrious; Lazarus was illustrious; but Mary was inspired. She was not an invaluable helper when work needed to be done. The duties of the kitchen were unattractive when Jesus was speaking in the sitting room! The bread in the oven was forgotten when manna from heaven was falling in the next room! She sat at the feet of Jesus and was

content.

(1) Her Increasing Desire to Learn. When other people discussed the miracles of Jesus, Mary considered His message. What He said was more attractive than anything He did. Had she been given the choice of being present in an amazing healing service or sitting quietly in His Bible class, her choice would have been immediate. She was a most attentive listener, for everything He said was of the utmost importance. She was His most ardent disciple; to sit at His feet was heaven!

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(2) Her illuminating Discernment Through Listening. Her eyes were filled with wonder. She sat in the home of Simon the leper, but her thoughts were elsewhere. Some of the disciples were discussing the expected kingdom, and their enthusiasm was contagious. Yet, Mary frowned. Those men were misinformed. Her Lord was about to die. Her eyes were misty; the only kingdom that mattered was that which He intended to establish within the hearts of people who loved Him. He would be the corn of wheat which would die to produce a great harvest. The men listened, but heard nothing! When she anointed the Lord with her valuable ointment, onlookers criticized her, but Jesus said: "Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this" (see John 12:7).

(3) Her Inspired Devotion in Loving. When she anointed His body, she gave the greatest of all her possessions. There was not much time left, if she intended to give Him a special gift, there was need for haste. Nothing was too good for her Lord. When Martha complained about Mary's absence from the kitchen, Jesus replied: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42). Faithful service is excellent, but unless continuing and deepening love for Christ be its inspiration, delight becomes a drudgery, and the joy of Christian living a memory.

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