

# The Feet of Jesus-the Place for Personal Necessity - Part 4

by Philip Bennett Power

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of receiving Jesus in our lives, and the dangers of competing with Him.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 46:10, Matthew 11:28, Luke 10:39, John 4:23, John 11:21, Philipians 4:6, Colossians 3:23, Hebrews 4:16, James 4:8

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Inner Communion"

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## Description

Philip Bennett Power preaches about the story of Mary and Martha at Jesus' feet, highlighting the importance of spiritual perception and deep devotion to Christ. The sermon emphasizes the different stages of spiritual development and the need to discern between outward service and inner communion with Jesus. It explores the significance of giving ourselves to Christ and receiving from Him, as well as the defense of Mary's choice to prioritize spiritual nourishment over worldly tasks. Jesus' response showcases His understanding, correction of mistaken views, and encouragement for all to seek close communion with Him.

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## Transcript

"And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word." Luke 10:39

The Word of God may be more fitly compared to a stream with all its variety of ripple, current, and depth, with all its diversity of wooded bank and pebbly strand--than to the ocean, all agitated--or calm--as far as eye can reach; and which, so far as we can see, either dashes itself in one long agony against the jutting cliffs, or sinks, subdued we know not how, upon the almost level shore.

The Word is full of journeyings and restings, 'of war and peace,' of joyfulness and sighs; of darkness--from that of eventide, to that which can be felt; of lights--from that of day dawn, to the time when the sun is at its meridian. You can hear in it the minstrelsy of the lover, and the trumpet of the warrior, the chant for the bride, the wail for the dead. The records of infancy, and manhood, and old age are there, for the Scripture contains the story of man--yes, and much more is there, for it contains the story of man with God.

Even in this one subject of "The Feet of Jesus" is this great variety to be found.

Here are multitudes to be cast down in their sore need, here must come the solitary one in his woe. Here is the excited agony of the mother--here the calm rest of the Gadarene; here is one neglecting to give

even water--here is another supplying its place with ointment and with tears; here is man dishonoring by nailing to a cross--here is God honoring by placing an angel guard in the tomb; here is the fear of a loving apostle--and the "fear not" of a still more loving master. The feet of Jesus are unchanged, even though they be now "like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace;" they were always a place of grace on earth--and they are the same in heaven.

This story of Mary at Jesus' feet is, as it were, one of the still deep pools which reflect the stars. It is not really still, for the current of the river is passing through it all the while--there was the flow of earnest life in Mary's soul, though her body was at rest. And we would have been glad to have had only to do with Mary--but that Martha comes and troubles this pool; and in part leads our minds, whether we will or not--away from the beautiful calm which her sister found at Jesus' feet. We might have wished it otherwise, yet many a one stepping in here, has found a Bethesda, in which he has been healed of an infirmity which he had.

Our profit must not, however, be purchased altogether at Martha's expense. From time immemorial, she has afforded a theme to preachers, who would dissuade their hearers from an inordinate pursuit of worldly things; and she has suffered no little at their hands. To hear some people speak, one would think that in Martha there was no good thing, that she had not a soul above the food she served; but he who would understand Martha's fault, as we find it here, must know something of Martha herself; and to know what she was, would be obliged to read along with this story, what is written about her in John 11.

This is the woman who said, "Lord if You had been here, my brother would not have died;" who said still more, "But I know that even now, whatever You will ask of God, God will give You;" who said as much as the boldest of the Apostles, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

We would willingly think solely of Mary and her Lord--but that is impossible; so let us range what we would to say under three heads:

Martha,

Mary,

Christ,

in which we shall find a position taken up, attacked, defended.

But before we consider Mary at the feet--there kept by Christ, though attempted to be drawn away by Martha--let us pause a moment on the reception into their house.

Jesus "entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house;" the 'certain' village and 'certain' woman seem vague; but there was a precision about them both in the mind of Jesus--the 'certain village' was one which contained a hospitable house for Him; and the 'certain woman' was a well-known friend.

There are houses in the world which, to the ordinary eye, are in no wise different from others--but to Christ they are the houses of His friends. Looking down now from His height of glory--He knows them all. All the houses of a street are not alike to Him; in some He has a place--and in others none; in some He is known, honored, loved, received, served, and ministered to--and in others, His name is little more than recognized, even as it might have been in hundreds of houses of Judea.

There is not a village or hamlet--but that Jesus knows every house in it, in which He would be warmly received.

And very humble are many of the houses of His friends--small roadside cottages--often little better than what we would call hovels--but they are different to Him from all other dwellings--they are the houses of His friends.

In what light is my house viewed by Jesus? is a question we may well put to ourselves. Is He welcomed in it? Do I wish it to be a worldly home--or a Christ-like home?

If we wish our house to be Christ's, we know His ways--what would please Him, and what would not; we may have it so ordered, as to have it one which He would recognize as a welcome place--if He came our way.

We need not be solicitous about the size, or furnishings, or decorations of the earthly dwelling--for the little time we shall need it. The one point to be careful about is--is my house one that Jesus knows? Yes, has He friends here? Am I and my family, His friends? Are we well known to Him? Can I reverently say 'my house is His home?'

This is but a passing thought--but it is a useful--it may be a very blessed one.

Here then in the house of His friends, is Jesus received.

The reception of Jesus! At first sight the words would imply bustle and excitement, and the out-putting of great energies, and the making of great preparation. No doubt, it was so in Martha's mind, even when Jesus came to her in the lowliness of His manhood; how much more would it be so now, when it is impossible for us to dissociate Him from His sovereignty, and all the majesty which almost from our infancy we know to be His.

This is an instance--one of the many, in which our first impressions need correcting. And this one is worth correcting, for mistaken views about how Jesus can be most acceptably received--are keeping many from courageously opening all their heart-doors to Him, and asking Him in. In truth, the thought of our receiving Him, blessed and true though it be--is to be corrected and adjusted by the thought of His receiving us. Martha was full of the idea of 'receiving' Jesus; the corrective was supplied by her sister's 'being received' as a disciple and a learner, by the Lord.

To 'give' to Jesus, is a high and indeed a natural impulse of a truly loving soul--for what kind of love is that, which does not delight in giving! But to 'receive' from Him is something higher, deeper and better in every way. Those who can pass beyond the outward and material substance of what is received, into the invisible, subtle and delicate feeling of right receiving, with all the emotions which belong to it, know a mystery of love indeed. The ancient alchemist spent a life-time in trying to turn baser substances to gold; but love's alchemy can turn a wild flower with no garniture but a dew drop, into a more precious gift than jewelry set with the most glittering of gems.

This is beautiful--but it is rare; and it gives us a glimpse of how much of what is noble and precious. God has made possible to be linked to common things; and of how all this nobility and preciousness may be the property of the poorest as well as of the richest and great. But we must not follow out the thought.

To return to the scene before us here, Jesus, who ever leaves a gift where He has been, will correct the exaggerated importance of giving, when put into competition with receiving. It is a deep lesson--one, the bare idea of which, many can scarcely even take in; but He knew its price, and He would teach it to the loved ones here.

Christ would correct the mistake--as to what will please Him most. He would show us, as we shall see presently, that we are likely to misunderstand Him. Martha's blame and Mary's praise are for all time--they are for the Church--they embody principles which in truth are everlasting.

Now, let us as we proposed, look at all three in order--and first as to MARTHA. Much has been said about the natural characteristics of these sisters. Martha has always been considered a woman of an active, bustling, energetic disposition; and so, no doubt, to a great extent she was. And expositors have frequently seen nothing more than these; and so have failed to draw any teaching from the narrative, except that, 'it is bad to be too much taken up with the things of time and sense.'

We accept this as in part, a description of Martha's character, and we desire to profit by the practical lesson grounded on it. But allowing full room for the difference between the natural characteristics of the sisters, we must go below them to discover the true teaching which we have here. They were sisters in blood--and, as we see in John 11, in faith; but they were dissimilar in character and temperament, and more important still, in depth of spiritual perception and attainment. This last is the true key to the story; and we have to deal, not with a worldly and a spiritual person as antagonistic the one to the other--but with two dear children of God, and lovers of Jesus--only in different stages of development; and so, looking from different standpoints at their Lord.

As our concern now lies with Mary rather than Martha, we may content ourselves with this statement, only drawing attention to a teaching from the fact that Martha and Mary were sisters, and dwelling in the one house.

If between these two, dwelling under the same roof, we perceive such a difference; what diversity may we not expect to find among many in the same Church! And let us beware of falling in our own day and among those with whom we have to do, into the mistake which is so commonly made about the sisters of Bethany. As people forget the 11th chapter of John, and almost degrade Martha from being a disciple at all; so are some inclined to almost unchristianize those whose experience is not the same as theirs! We may, indeed, recognize the being troubled about many things, we may not sympathize with it, we may have risen above it. But the Martha we despise--is dear to Jesus! Yes, (even as in the 11th chapter of John,) she can on an emergency rise to a great height of faith. Our readiness to disown each other in the large circle of the Church of God--whether from the Martha or the Mary side, may find its correction here.

Let the reader also note the different degrees of attainment in these two sisters. And with the difference of attainment came that of development and practice. It may not be, that Mary loved Jesus any more than Martha--but only that her spiritual apprehension and the development of her spiritual life were greater. So is it often now--spiritual apprehension is not always manifested in personal affection; no doubt this causes loss--but thanks be to God, it does not invalidate love.

But now we pass to MARY. She was the one found at the feet of Jesus, and therefore with her we have principally to do.

First then, as to the POSITION she took up. It is sometimes helpful to look at what a thing is not--as well as at what it is.

This was not an indulgence of sentimental affection towards Christ; nor of personal ease as regards herself. Either would have put her in the place of rebuke, instead of defending her. Christ would have estimated the first at what it was worth; and the second He would have severely condemned. In all probability, had either been the position of Mary at this time, He would have answered her sister's complaint very differently from the way in which He did, and told the one at His feet, to stir herself, and attend to her part, in that at least which was needful, in the household work.

There is a certain kind of sentimental affection towards Christ, which may be mistakenly taken for solid love; but He knows exactly what it is, and does not countenance it. Mere sentimentality is a sickly washy thing--and confers no honor on the Lord.

In truth what Mary had was the highest of all devotion, that of the mind and soul. She was all alive in them--to outward appearance she was merely sitting at Jesus' feet--but her inmost being was waiting upon Him with all its powers.

She had more to do with action than her sister knew. For what was she then doing, as she sat at the feet of Jesus--but receiving those blessed seeds of truth into an honest and good heart, which were doubtless destined to mature into action later. Martha's love was showing itself in giving what could be seen--Mary's love, in taking in the unseen. Martha's love was spending itself--Mary's love was gathering in for greater spending by and by.

Mary, we may be sure, knew more than Martha of the inner mind of Jesus; that it was His great pleasure to give and not to receive--that the choicest foods of this world--were nothing compared with the least nourishment of the soul--that His very presence allowed of lawful expectation. She took up the position of a receiver of Christ's loving-kindness--an embracer of spiritual opportunity--an expecter of out-flowings of love. She was, in truth, a great honorer of the wayfaring, the outcast--and almost wandering Jesus. The position which the great men of her country despised, was the very one she took up--at the feet of Jesus.

And how did she come to do so? She had evidently seized an opportunity. And why did she?

Perhaps Jesus had begun to speak, and attracted by what He said--she placed herself where she would not miss a word. Or it may be that, from former experiences of Him, she at once took up the loving listener's place, expecting, that as formerly, so now, she would get blessing.

It was a position in which she made much of Jesus--in the way in which He wishes to be made much of; in which she manifested the higher appreciation. Had Mary not been sitting all eager and intent at Jesus' feet, she would have been with Martha in full activity of service. She is only not with Martha for Christ, because more immediately with Christ Himself. She saw Jesus in His true character, the giver rather than the receiver--the One honored more by receiving from--than giving to.

And how far do we know this truth? How far have we entered into what we might call the heart of Jesus? Can we perceive that 'giving' is almost as it were--a very necessity of His life.

Our little spendings have their place, and a very blessed one in the mind of Jesus; but we must never put them in competition with Him; nor may we allow them to take the place of His.

But alas! are there not some, who are neither giving to Jesus, nor receiving from Him--into whose house, whose heart, He has never come! If, by any means this is so with the one who reads these lines, let it be so no more!

There is no one who will value what you do for Him as Jesus will; no one who will give to you as He will; no one who will consecrate your house as He will.

Do not say that you must be of the world, for your business or your family leave you little time for Christ. Nay, even when you are doing your mundane business--be for Jesus. See the price He put upon the heart; and even if you cannot do much for Him, let Him do much for you.

Let Him be welcome in your house, and if you have no house, then in your room; and if you have no room, then by your bedside, or to your thoughts, as you lie upon that bed itself!

But chief above all, let Him be welcome to your heart--there is His house, where He is received with honor and joy, in your ministrings and the listenings, the activities and the rest of your love.

The position thus devotedly taken up by Mary, is now assailed by Martha. It was then as it is now, who can quietly take up a position of peaceful learning at 'the feet of Jesus,' without its being disturbed by somebody!

There is evil enough in this mistaken attack of Martha's, without more being added to it by expositors. She was not wholly engrossed with selfishness as some would think; probably she was not selfish in the matter at all; nor was she of necessity intent on making a display; she was for honoring her Lord, only in her own way--and that was not the way most acceptable to Him.

There was that which was good, and there was that which was bad, in her assault on Mary. There was her desire to honor Christ--but there was the ignorance of the way in which He could be more highly honored; there was the dogmatic putting of her own standard of duty--a duty which she was endeavoring to perform even beyond her strength; but there was also a non-recognition of anything higher, of anything beyond.

It is just what we see every day; and what, if we are not on our guard against it, we find creeping continually upon ourselves. And the more we are individually interested in any branch of work, or in any experience of feeling--the more likely are we to make our work and feelings--the standards for all others.

Martha wished Christ to be served in her own way; she was intent on it. It may be that, in part she was under the influence of her natural character as an active homemaker, and wished that all that politeness could do, would be put forth--and it was for the honor of her Lord. Those dishes were to be dressed for and set before Him. And so far, her thought was good.

Overstrained good may, however, become evil. Some of the most subtle and best masked evil--is nothing but this; and Martha so magnified her own position and work--as to have no eye for, no understanding of, Mary's position and work.

She had no calm judgment; and probably after some waiting, and some considerable preliminary making of preparations, at last she spoke with her tongue; and ran, so to speak, full tilt against Christ Himself. "Don't you care," (is it nothing to you,) that my sister has left me to serve alone?" Martha did what many a one attempts now--she tried to enlist Christ in her quarrel. She would have made Him a partizan.

Martha thought she was strong in the feeling and judgment, which He must have on the matter, and in the claims of human relationship, "my sister," "me;" yes, and in the mixed feelings of indignation, and justice, and pity, which are summed up in the word 'alone;' and in truth, the onslaught was severe; and had there not been something more powerful to counteract it, must have prevailed.

Like Martha, we are often going further than we think; we are unconsciously but really, wounding Christ Himself. We are for dragging Him into conflicts which are utterly distasteful to Him; we are arguing petty claims of our own--and bringing them into competition with His! What what they have to do with Christ?

The defence of Mary by Christ, was a discriminating and a decided one.

Jesus did not ignore Martha; He noted all about her, and addressed her position--as well as Mary's. The perception and statement of Mary's immeasurable superiority, did not induce Him to pour contempt on Martha, whose fault was, not work--but being overburdened in it. Here, Jesus gave us the true rule of action. We must never despise, never ignore the position of an adversary, or the adversary himself. On the contrary, we must enter as far as possible into his views of matters, before we judge them.

Jesus notes that Martha would have supplied Him with many things. For whom were they all--but for Himself! But they brought on her-- anxious care and trouble; she let her natural energy no doubt go out into them--but it had overwhelmed her.

Jesus knows the caring and the troubled ones, as well as those who are in deeper fault; on the one hand, He will not fail to condemn an error--just because it is entertained on His behalf. On the other hand, He will not, because it is an error, refuse to give credit for what there is in it of good.

But Jesus was very decided; it "shall not be taken away from her." I will not take her good part away from her--you shall not-- and circumstances must not.

No! Jesus will never send us forth from Himself, to be drawn around in a whirlpool. I do not say He will not send us forth in proper season to work, even as he did the demoniac; but He will not fall in with the mistakes of energetic and misguided people, as they would wish. Martha would have involved Mary in the same whirl that she was in herself.

Therefore there is great encouragement here to our aiming at some close communion with the Lord. He will not send us away. He knows the longing of our souls; that we are craving to be fed and taught by Him Himself; that we feel that none can satisfy us but Himself. Blessed are such hungry ones--for they shall be filled.

Thus, they who gather themselves in to rest at the feet of Jesus, have no need to fear that they will be upbraided by Him. At the proper time He will send them forth to their work--as He did the demoniac; but He will not have them vexed for every excitement that comes their way. And as He will not Himself take away the rest of His people, no more will He allow others to do so. Martha sought a commission so to do to Mary--but Jesus refused to give it.

And there are some who seem to have avocation for stirring up everybody, and almost everything, too. They know neither the power nor the pleasure of rest; their tremendous energy, or their irritable restlessness, would carry away, or fret others whose chief power and life is in the peace of God. From such we may take refuge in Christ Himself.

But He will do even more than give us this. He will defend us from circumstances. He says, 'they shall not be able to take you from My feet.'

Now, it often happens that circumstances appear to involve great need--and to call upon us to engage in them. But is this need always so real? is the necessity invariably laid on us? Some people think so; and the consequence is that they leave the feet of Jesus, scatter themselves, and become shallow; they are to be found in everything--and so is their heart!

The apparent need is not always a real one; it was not so here. Had it been, Christ would have sent Mary at once to her sister's help; but He refused to fall in with Martha's mistake. Christ discriminated and judged in this matter; and He will teach us to do the same.

But the Lord's defense of Mary was reasonable, as well as decided. It might be said, was not Mary to be concerned with the hospitality of the house--as well as Martha; of Christ's having the very best in every way which it could afford; that best, made the best indeed by all the care and pains which they could bestow upon it?

Yes! Mary was as jealous of the hospitality of the house as Martha; but she had so overpassed Martha in spiritual apprehension, that she knew that to be at the Savior's feet was more acceptable to Him, than to be engaged in preparing many choice dishes for Him.

She had not grasped the great outlines of truth any more clearly or boldly than Martha; the 11th chapter of John would teach us that. But the spiritual perceptive faculty was more delicate with Mary, and it enabled her to discriminate between seeming neglect and real honor.

Mary was in truth giving far more than Martha; she was giving her very self, in that form which is most precious to Christ--as a receiver of Himself.

On this giving of ourselves, Leighton has the following beautiful words: "Let us give Him ourselves, or nothing; and to give ourselves to Him is not His advantage--but ours. Thus does a Christian make himself, his daily sacrifice--he renews his gift of himself every day to God. Now that whereby we offer all other spiritual sacrifices, and even ourselves, is love. That is the holy fire which burns up all, sends up our prayers, and our hearts, and our whole selves a burnt-offering to God!"

In the last day will it revealed--how much some have given, who had but little in external religious services.

And great encouragement may be gathered here, for those who have not much outwardly to give. Some are prevented by illness, by circumstances, from doing much outwardly. We do not say their case is that which is spoken of here; but that they also may gather incidentally some comfort.

Everyone who has HIMSELF--has much to give! Everyone who can appreciate Jesus, listen to Him, lovingly trust Him--has, in all that, opportunity of honoring the Lord. Such people may be misunderstood, or possibly despised, by the religious world--but they will be vindicated by Him.

Had we not intended to speak of the Lord separately, some of what we are now about to say would have been noticed when considering Mary. JESUS Himself was mistaken and misjudged. "Is it nothing to You?" said Martha. She formed a wrong judgment of Christ. She did not see those deeper interests, that greater honor, that profounder relationship, which He did; and which He recognized by keeping Mary at His feet.

This is exactly how it comes to pass--that we so often wrong the Lord. It is simply out of shallowness and ignorance.

We, in point of fact, often say to Him, "Do You not care? Is it nothing to You Jesus?" Because He is not acting for us, or by us, as we would have Him to do--that we charge Him with thoughtlessness of us!

"Do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone!" She only saw her sister in relationship to herself--not to Christ! and spoke in her claims accordingly. No doubt it was in order that Christ would be served with the many things that Martha wanted Mary's help; but she brings herself as 'left,' prominently forward; and in the mention of "my sister,"--the human relationship, we see a claim put in, in competition with Christ's!

If a mere man had been in the Lord's place--how differently would he have acted. He would, in all probability, have fired up in indignation; he would have asserted the claims of his personal dignity; but Jesus vindicates Mary--and not Himself. He passes by the personal affront, 'do you not care;' and throws His shield over the one who sat listening at His feet.

Jesus was here, as ever, forgetful of His own self. So far as principle was involved, and truth--He vindicated them by the way in which He spoke of Mary's better part; but He did not mention Martha's attack upon Himself.

There are many teachings for us in this.

We are taught to vindicate truths--rather than ourselves; to pass by what is merely personal--even though it be unjust. This is very hard to do. Yet Jesus did it, and that, often under circumstances of great provocation. Let us try to do the same.

We see here how He put the hunger and thirst of Mary's soul and its refreshment, before those of His own body, and its needs. His contentment with what was simple, His forgetfulness of SELF in the willing loss of an elaborate feast. Martha, if she could have seen it, together with Mary at His feet, and but a single dish to satisfy hunger--would have been more acceptable to Jesus--than all the preparations which both Martha and Mary could have made!

And so, there is great encouragement to us to invite Jesus into our poverty. However poor may be our circumstances, if we have ourselves to give--we have what He requires; for He seeks not what is ours--but us!

And it is important to observe His recognition of the worth of that which is communicable from Himself. He vindicates those who are appreciating Him, not feebly, or theoretically, or as a matter of course--but in the full power of the consciousness of how wise they are--what good they get.

He knows that they get good from Him--as distinguished from mere channels; that there is a deep need of our drawing personality and directly from Him; that there is a communion with Himself which is independent of all mere channels; and He defends those who appreciate being near His very feet--His self and heart.

It is of as much importance to us that--Christ would know how well He can supply, as that He would know how great is our need; His riches--as well as our needs. For He will always put the two together; each would be strong alone; but each acquires fresh, yes, doubled strength, when brought into connection with

the other.

And it will be well for us to act on this knowledge. Let us often plead Christ's wealth with Him; let us bring it forward as a reason why much should be poured out to us; let it excite our expectation. Humanly speaking, the more people have--the more is expected from them. Spiritually speaking, the more we know of Christ's wealth, the more we should expect from Him.

We should not stop at merely thinking about our poverty. We may think about this until we grow morbid; until we have no capacity for thinking of anything higher. When Jesus corrects the mistake of the Laodiceans, and tells them that they are wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; He adds, "I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich, and white clothing, that you may be clothed." Jesus is too considerate, too tenderhearted, too noble--to remind us of our deep poverty, unless He were willing to relieve it.

We can believe that Jesus thinks with great happiness of all the fullness and riches in Himself; that "it pleased the Father that in Him would all fullness dwell." And in this thought of His fullness and exceeding wealth, His people have large place. It is all for them! The true secret of pleasure in the possession of wealth, is to have it for the purpose of giving. The pleasure of hoarding is a pleasure of sin. Jesus hoards nothing; what He has, and is communicable to His people, He does communicate; and doing this is joy to Him.

A part of the defense of Mary, consisted also in Christ's saying that she would in one sense leave Him unserved; if she left the position she took up at His feet. He was content to forego the lesser, for He knew that the greater was present.

And Jesus is the same now as He was in Mary's time; He will be to us even as He was to her. There are now invisible and quiet receptions and teachings at Jesus' feet--even as there were at Bethany, when Mary sat at those blessed feet!

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