

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Sit, Stand, Walk and Run: Sitting

This week is the first of four talks based on the everyday activities of sitting, standing walking and running. Strange as it may seem, the Bible has a lot to say about these four things and many of the writers in the Bible use these words to convey Bible truth.

To start the series, I want to consider with you the pictures conveyed to us by the word "sitting". I would like to do so using incidents in the lives of various people whose stories are recorded by the Spirit of God in the Bible. I want to think about David and Mephibosheth, Martha and Mary, about Ruth the daughter in law of Naomi and about Lot, Abraham's nephew.

I'm not that old but I seem to remember there used to be a radio programme for children where just before the story was told the presenter would say, "If you're sitting comfortably then I'll begin". Well, so will I because I think that being comfortable is one of the main ideas conveyed by the word "sitting". I'm sure that there are occasions when we are sitting and maybe waiting uncomfortably for results at a doctor's surgery or for a difficult interview with a client or employer but today I am thinking of the times when we are sitting comfortably, contentedly; we are at home.

Before we consider the four incidents I have mentioned can I just remind you of the story of Legion as recorded in the Gospels (see Mark 5). He was a man possessed by many demons and lived a miserable and frightening life, sleeping rough in a graveyard. Jesus was the only person who could help and free him, and He did! When the locals came out to see what was going on, Legion was calm and clothed sitting at the feet of Jesus.

We all have to start here; our needs vary immensely, but we all have one overwhelming need, we need our sins forgiven, we need peace with God. This is only available from one source, Jesus Christ. Have you ever had the experience of Legion, once troubled and frightened, but now peaceful and clothed with the righteousness of Christ, sitting contentedly at His feet? What a transformation!

Now can I read to you several verses from Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" Ephesians 2:4-8.

Do you remember the story of David and Mephibosheth in the Old Testament? Mephibosheth was the grandson of King Saul, a powerful man who had made himself an enemy of David and had in fact tried to murder him on more than one occasion. King Saul and his son Jonathan, the father of Mephibosheth had both died during a battle with the Philistines and now David had been made king. It would not have been unheard of in those days for the new king to have rounded up all the family of the dead king and imprison or even kill them. David was not like that at all. He is called a man after God's own heart. Instead of taking revenge on Saul's family, David makes enquiry to see if there is a family member to whom he could "show the kindness of God" 2 Samuel 9:3.

This is just a faint picture of the favour that God has shown towards us. Mephibosheth was a man who had been crippled by a childhood accident. His grandfather was a man who hated David, and Mephibosheth could do nothing himself to curry favour with the new king. Yet Mephibosheth was a welcome guest in King David's palace, and invited to sit at the king's table whenever he wanted! Why? Because David wanted to show Mephibosheth the "kindness of God".

You and I as believers on the Lord Jesus have been blest in an even more remarkable way! Try as hard as he might, David could never heal Mephibosheth's injuries nor could he make him his son. We were more than badly injured, we were dead! Dead in trespasses and sins, but God has shown His kindness to us, and has saved us, healed us and made us His sons!

Accepted into God's favour in the Lord Jesus, we have been made to sit together in heavenly places. We have a new home, and we can be completely at home there! This is not something we could have achieved in a million years but God in His great love towards us has blest us in this way and will display in a coming day His great mercy and grace in us. Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel' said, [God] "raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory" 1 Samuel 2:8. This is an amazing demonstration of God's mercy and grace! Those who once were enemies to Him and entirely unresponsive to His love, God has loved, forgiven, saved and made His sons, seating us in spirit in His presence.

I cannot begin to understand the immensity of this fact. Once my sins and sinful nature had placed an immeasurable distance between me and a Holy God, but now, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ my sins have been righteously forgiven and I have a new nature. I am accepted by God in His beloved Son and am as near and as dear to God as His own Son. This is not something I have to strive for, nor is it presumptuous of me to claim it. It is a supreme act of love and grace on the part of God and He wants all His children to enjoy this favour always.

This is not a privilege God wants us to delay enjoying. We don't have to wait until we reach heaven; we can and should enjoy it now! "I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" Song of Songs 2:3-4. These words were spoken by the Shulamite bride about the man who loved her. Just to be in his company was a delight to her because of their love for each other. Not that our love for the Lord Jesus can be compared to His love for us! He died to prove His deep and constant love; our love for Him, or I should say my love for Him, varies from day to day.

There are however lots of things that can interrupt our enjoyment of the presence of Jesus. Martha and Mary were two sisters who loved to invite the Lord Jesus into their home that they shared with their brother, Lazarus. But on one occasion, Martha was overly concerned with the housework whilst Mary, her sister, was content to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to Him talk. Martha complained to the Lord Jesus that Mary had left her to do all the work alone, but rather than rebuking Mary for being lazy, Jesus said that she had actually chosen the "good part" and it would not be taken away from her. The Lord Jesus knew the value and importance of His people spending time in His company but amazingly He also values us being there!

Putting these two pictures together we learn another aspect of the ideas behind sitting. If the story of Mephibosheth and the passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians would teach us a little about the grace and kindness of God and the place of unwarranted favour that believers have been placed in, we learn from the story of Martha and Mary the value of time spent sitting at the feet of Jesus. Do we feel like the bride in the Song of Songs? "I sat down in his shade with great delight" Song of Songs 2:3.

For me this is something I find difficult. It is easier to be busy' and hard just to sit and enjoy the presence of the Lord Jesus. When we are busy we don't have time to think and reflect on our spiritual health, and yet we do need to slow down sometimes and recharge our batteries. We also need just to learn to spend time with our Lord and, as we do so, we will grow more and more like Him. What could possibly be better than that?

If we turn to the story of Naomi and Ruth we have another aspect of sitting. Just to refresh your memory, Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, had left God's Promised Land and moved to Moab to try and escape the effects of a serious famine. Whilst in Moab, Elimelech had died and Naomi's two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, had married two local girls, Orpah and Ruth. When Mahlon and Chilion also died, Naomi decided she must return to Israel and her home town, Bethlehem. Naomi was now a penniless widow and only Ruth accompanied her back home, where Boaz, a rich local landowner, met them and fell in love with Ruth. Marriage to Ruth, also a penniless widow from another country was not a simple matter however in the rigid society in which Boaz lived and Boaz has issues that he had to resolve. You can imagine the agitation and anxiety of Ruth as she waited to see how matters would unfold!

It is the wise advice that Naomi gave to the younger woman Ruth that I want to focus on. She said, "Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out" Ruth 3:18. If Ruth was anything like me, this would be unwelcome advice! How hard it is to wait and sit still! When something deeply concerns us, often there are steps we can and should take, but sometimes we have to just sit still! Sit still and wait for God to guide and intervene. Jacob had been promised immense blessings by God through his father, Isaac, but rather than wait and trust God, he and his mother felt they had to scheme and plan to ensure Jacob received what God had already promised to him. The results were disastrous!

Jacob having deceived his father had to flee from the home and I believe he never saw his father and mother again. Jacob was blest and became a very rich man and the head of the nation of Israel. But how much simpler and happier his life would have been if he had "sat still" and waited for God to do what He had promised He would do instead, of interfering and thus ruining the happiness of the family. Are you like this? Not too sure what to do but convinced that action is needed? Doing something has to be better than doing nothing! No! There is a remarkable verse in Isaiah 30:7 which could be translated, "Their strength is to sit still" The nation of Israel had a lot of problems, and rather than

wait for God's help had turned to the Egyptians. They would have been better to wait; God said, "Their strength is to sit still!"

There is a similar expression in Exodus: "Do not be afraid. Stand still and see the salvation of the LORD" Exodus 14:13. This isn't an excuse for laziness; rather it is a call to trust a faithful God. God does expect us to do what we can do. Jesus sent Peter out to catch a fish; He sent another disciple to fetch a donkey; and still others were asked to distribute the fish and bread. But sometimes, and probably more often than we realise, we need to sit still and wait and trust God to undertake for us! I feel quite hypocritical talking to you about this. I am responsible for the employment of several people and haven't found the last eighteen months of the "Credit Crunch" at all easy. How hard it is, having done all we reasonably can, and still with seemingly insurmountable problems to solve, just to "sit still!"

Is this a situation that you find yourself in? Are you perplexed, troubled and agitated? There is a strong temptation to chase around and try and solve all the problems on your own. You can't! The lesson from the story of Ruth and Naomi is that sometimes we need to "sit still!" To sit still in the presence of God. This lesson is reinforced by another incident in the lives of Martha and Mary whom we have already considered. Their brother Lazarus had become dangerously ill and they had sent a message to Jesus asking for His help. Quite deliberately, Jesus had delayed in coming to their aid and Lazarus had died. When Jesus did finally come to their house, Martha rushed out to meet Him, but the Bible records that "Mary sat still in the house".

Both Martha and Mary said very similar things to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here our brother would not have died" (John 11:21). But I wonder if there was a note of accusation in Martha's voice? Mary on the other hand had learnt to "sit still" and wait for Jesus to call her. Few of us can understand the conflicting thoughts that must have been chasing around Mary's head following such a dreadful loss. Yet she had learnt this vital lesson that sometimes, and probably a lot more often than we realise, we need to be still. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" Isaiah 30:15.

The final person I want to think about is Lot, the nephew of Abraham. These two rich men were nomads, wandering herdsmen with great flocks to care for. They had had to part company as their flocks had grown so much that they had difficulty finding sufficient pasture in any one place for both their flocks. Abraham, trusting that God would take care of his interests, had allowed Lot to choose which part of the land he would occupy. Lot had made a selfish choice, not considering what God might want him to do at all. Unfortunately his choice led Lot to settle close to the incredibly wicked city of Sodom, and eventually to live there.

I don't know what sort of man you consider Lot to be but the Bible calls him "just"! 2 Peter 2:7. He was a good man in a very bad place! The Bible would seem to indicate that Lot had even become a magistrate in the city of Sodom! "Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom" Genesis 19:1. It was the place where the leaders or magistrates of the city could control who came in and who went out. They could administer some degree of control and order. Maybe Lot thought that he could improve the place, get rid of some of the evil and depraved practices, generally smarten the city up and improve its appalling reputation!

Lot and others like him would be well advised to read the opening verses of the book of Psalms. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful" Psalm 1:1.

It is not without significance that in the previous chapter in Genesis we read that Abraham was "sitting in the tent door" (Genesis 18:1) and Lot was sitting in the gate of the wicked city of Sodom! The company we keep affects how we behave. "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'" 1 Corinthians 15:33. Poor Lot ended his days living in a cave, fathering children by his own daughters!

Do you think that once King David had invited Mephibosheth to share his food and enjoy his place at the palace that Mephibosheth would have quickly gone back to his impoverished former existence? You and I, if believers on the Lord Jesus, have been given free access into God's presence; why would we want to "sit in the seat of the scornful"? Why would we want to be guided by the ungodly, walk in the way that sinners walk, or sit with those who scoff at God?

This verse is not for one moment saying that we should live like hermits, cut off from all contact with people who do not share our faith. Read the verse carefully; we are not to walk in the counsel or by the principles that govern the ungodly, not to go in the path, or be found acting in the way of sinners, not to sit, or be comfortable in the company of those who mock God.

Abraham, sitting in his tent door, maintaining his character as a faithful follower of God, had far more influence and was far more use to the people of that land than ever Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. It's quite a challenge isn't it? Sometimes we just don't want to be seen to be different! Sometimes we make a conscious decision that to make more friends or to advance our careers we will do things, watch things or go places that cannot possibly benefit us as Christians. But in doing so, we find that we cannot at the same time enjoy the companionship of the Lord Jesus.

So are you sitting comfortably? Do you know like Legion, the blessing of being cleansed and healed and sitting at the feet of Jesus? What about the wonderful place of privilege that belongs to you as being loved by God, made alive with Christ, raised with Christ and made to “sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”? Do you, do I, enjoy the new home we have as sons in the presence of God? And finally have we learnt to sit, not in the company of those who mock God, but quietly at the feet of Jesus, learning from Him, growing to be like Him and learning to trust Him?

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