

# That Good Part

By Peter McArthur



**“One thing is needed, and Mary (Miriam) has chosen that good part...”** (Luke 10:41-42).

What is this “one thing” and what is “that good part”? The text reads *“agathen merida”* sometimes translated as “that good portion”. Today in Jewish scholarly circles the phrase refers to the blessing of studying the Torah. Did Jesus the Rabbi possibly use it in the same way?

The Greek word *merida* is akin to the Hebrew word *helek* which means “a portion, share or lot,” and can metaphorically speaking refer to having a share of inheritance, or one’s lot in life.

The word appears in many Jewish writings in a similar context to the story of Mary at Jesus’ feet. When Jews gather to study, it’s traditional to pray this prayer before study commences: *“ten helkenu b’toratekha”* (God, please give us our portion in your Torah) and then when leaving aside the study you thank God for one’s “portion” in life, which was good because you had studied. See how David used a similar thought pattern.

(Psalm 119:57) YHWH is my portion; I have promised to keep Your words.

So in our story it’s obviously got to do with what Mary was doing. She was **sitting** at His feet. She was **hearing** His word. “Who **sat** at Jesus’ feet and **heard** his word.” (verse 39).

This sitting (or following) and hearing (or receiving) is mentioned by Moses in Deut. 33:3. "Indeed, He loves the people; All Your holy ones are in Your hand, And they **follow in Your steps**; Everyone **receives of Your words**.

To sit at someone’s feet or to follow their steps is a Hebraic way of submitting to another person’s teaching and authority – usually to a rabbi. Paul did this with his own teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, **educated under Gamaliel...**”

This was the ancient posture used by disciples or learners. They sat at the “feet” of their teachers - that is beneath them or next to them, stressing the idea of humility. When Scripture says that Mary sat at Jesus’ feet it means that she was acting as a disciple of his; that she listened attentively (lit. *went on listening*) to his instructions, because she was very keen to learn his teachings.

It’s also the position attributed to one who is grateful, respectful and wants to know. "When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, **sitting at Jesus' feet** dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid." (Luke 8:35)

We know the next part of our story so well as it's been the subject of thousands of sermons. Mary submits herself to Jesus and Martha gets upset and annoyed. Interestingly today people still get agitated with those who prefer to sit at Jesus' feet!

Now what is this "one thing"? Psalm 27:4 gives us the clue. "**One thing** I have asked from YHWH, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of YHWH all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of YHWH and to meditate in His temple."

This is single-mindedness. When Jesus said "**One thing** is needed..." he was referring to Mary's desire of single-mindedness; her singularity of thought. Jesus always went straight to the heart of the matter, to the very essence of things. He saw this portrayed in Mary and gave her credit for it.

Why then should we "seek God" and "inquire in His temple"? How does this apply to us today? Well clearly as New Testament people who have been Born Again (from above) "seeking God" and "inquiring in His temple" becomes figurative for us. We have already found God because He first sought after us. And we certainly don't need Temples or Sanctuaries in which to do any spiritual inquiring. We now have the Lord Jesus and the blessed Holy Spirit.

But there is a point to this seeking and inquiring. A principle that's important here is this: **Each spiritual breakthrough is preceded by a breaking down of old thought patterns.**

The place for this transformation is before God, at His feet. In that special place we become exposed to God's nature and character. We give time to Him. We invest quality time and attempt as far as possible to be real, true and transparent before the Throne. At that place, with that kind of mental and spiritual attitude our thoughts and ideas start to be re-adjusted to heaven's way of thinking. Certainly it takes time (and indeed some effort on our part) as we position ourselves at the feet of the Great Rabbi, our saviour. But the rewards are eternally satisfying.

It is a time of visitation, as it were. A "secret place" (Matthew 6:6) where wonderful things can happen to our inner man. It is not a time to withhold, but to receive – and to be extremely grateful!

Blessings to you as you learn to sit at His feet!

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