

Bethany

Characteristics of Christian Life: Fellowship, Service, Worship

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online: 02.12.2021, updated: 27.12.2021

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Bethany means the "House of Palms," hence is indicative of a place of rest, e.g. an oasis in the desert. There is scriptural evidence that the Lord was wont to resort to Bethany when he was in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. It would not be difficult to arrive at the correct conclusion as to the reason of His doing so. There were loyal hearts there who appreciated his company and prized his love, in contrast to the treachery of Judas, the hatred of the Pharisees, the cruelty of the soldiery and the cold hard fickleness of the people.

It was at Bethany that these loyal friends made the Lord a supper. At which the three essential features of the Christian life in the individual were portrayed in the business of the three members of the family named in the twelfth chapter of John's Gospel.

1. *Lazarus*, who had been raised from the dead had the privilege of sitting at the table with the Lord, indicating fellowship.
2. *Martha* served, hence she exhibited the feature of service.
3. *Mary*, in anointing the feet of her Lord with the treasured ointment, indicated worship.

These features, fellowship, worship and service are indissolubly associated. No one can rightly effect one of these, who ignores or is remiss in the observation of the others.

When all the disciples were looking forward with eagerness to the immediate display of the coming kingdom. Mary, alone, was in the Lord's mind as to the future. Her faith had apprehended the end of His pathway was necessarily that He should die, and, therefore, she grasped the opportunity. The other women essayed to perform that service, after His death and burial, but were too late. He had risen! (Mary was not at the sepulchre). She had bestowed on Him in His life-time the choicest treasured possession which she had. There was nothing too good to give to her Lord!

Since the Lord has gone on High, the significance of Bethany has continued. In the midst of the world that hated and crucified Him He finds positive delight in the response of His own to His love. There are hearts loyal to their absent Lord. They are found maintaining occupancy till He come!

The Lord went up from Bethany. He led the disciples out as far as to Bethany and having lifted up His hands He blessed them, as the true antitype of the priest in Old Testament times, with His hands filled with the favour of God, He bestows it in an unstinted manner.

It came to pass while He blessed them (or while He was blessing them), He was parted from them and was carried up into heaven. The real sense of the expression is that His blessing was an unfinished act! Although His position is changed since He has gone on High, He is still in the process of blessing His people.

The sequel was that they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the Temple praising and ascribing blessing to God. (Luke 24:50-53). So the Gospel which begins with great joy has a similar termination! That feature is characteristic of the whole era for the Christian. So that the Apostle Paul terminating his earthly pathway in a Roman prison could quite rightly exhort his Philippian readers to rejoice in the Lord!

The Lord went up from Bethany and it is to Bethany He will return. Bethany is still formed of loyal and expectant hearts, who join in cheerful resonance to the invitation of the Spirit and the Bride saying, "Come" to an absent Lord and Bridegroom. Meanwhile, we have the peerless privilege of occupying in His interests in the brief interval "till He come." The outburst from these hearts must necessarily be: — "Even, so come Lord Jesus!" His answer is: — "Yes! I come quickly!"

Original: "Bethany"

in *The Lord is There and other papers on Cognate Subjects*, pp. 41–43