

# The love that will not let me go

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How blessed to have found in Christ a Friend who loves with a love that will not let us go, according to that Word which tells us, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

Such love — the everlasting love of Christ, that never gives us up — cannot be satisfied until it has drawn out our love in response to His love. The answer to His love will only be realized in its fulness when at last we have reached love's eternal home. Nevertheless, on the way to the home, the love that appreciates Christ, in the place of His rejection and the day of His rejection, is very sweet to His heart. This we may surely learn from the value that is set by the Lord on the love of Mary, that led her to anoint His feet with the very precious ointment.

Very encouraging it is, and good for our souls, to learn the gracious ways of the Lord with his people in order to awaken love, maintain love, and deepen love, in our hearts. It is these gracious ways of the Lord that we would briefly trace in the New Testament stories of two devoted women.

### 1. THE AWAKENING OF LOVE. — Luke 7: 36-39, 47

In the great scene that takes place in the house of Simon the Pharisee, we see the awakening of love for the Saviour in the heart of a sinner. The Lord, in the perfection of His way, had stooped to grace with His presence the feast which the Pharisee had spread. While sitting at the table an unbidden guest enters, of whom the Lord can say, "she loved much." How, we may ask, was this love awakened in her soul?

There is no question as to the character of the woman. The Spirit of God has described her as "a woman in the city which was a sinner." Moreover her bad reputation was well known, for Simon is also aware that "she is a sinner." She was a sinner and knew it, and Simon knew it and everyone knew it. Further, she was a *burdened* sinner, and possibly had heard those wonderful words of the Lord, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Be this as it may, it is beyond question, that she saw in Christ the grace that could bless the undeserving. Thus driven by her need, and drawn by His grace, with the boldness of faith, she enters the Pharisee's house and takes her stand at the feet of Jesus.

The Spirit of God calls attention to the fine scene that follows with a "Behold." He would arrest our attention and have us to turn aside and see this great sight — the meeting between the devil's hell-bound sinner and God's heaven-sent Saviour. Doubtless, the onlookers were struck dumb with amazement, as they watched the scene unfolding itself before their eyes. They might well question

what would happen. Would the Lord expose her character, condemn her sins, and dismiss her from His holy presence? Ah, no! The proud Pharisee may condemn the sinner, to find himself exposed by the Saviour; but the Lord will not condemn a confessed sinner.

The wisdom of His way is as perfect as the grace of His heart. At first no word is spoken. The guests are silent in wonder, the Lord is silent in grace, the woman is silent in sorrow. No sound breaks the silence but the sobs of a weeping sinner. If, however, nothing is said, much takes place, for the sinner's *heart was broken* and the sinner's *heart was won*. She "stood at His feet behind Him weeping" and she "kissed" His feet. The tears tell of a heart that is broken, and the kisses of heart that is won.

What was it that broke her heart, and won her heart? Was it not that she saw something of the grace and holiness of the Saviour, and in the light of His glory she realized, as never before, the sinfulness of her life and her heart, and this *broke her heart*? But more, she realized that though she was a sinner full of sin, yet He was a Saviour full of grace for one who was full of sin. She found herself in the presence of One who knew her vile life through and through, and yet loved her, and this *won her heart*.

Good for each one, if we, too, have been in His presence, burdened and wretched by reason of our sins, there to discover that in Him we have found One who knows the worst about us and yet loves us. Thus to have love for Christ awakened in our souls, as we sing,

I've found a Friend, oh, such a Friend  
Who loved me ere I knew Him;  
Who drew me with the cords of love,  
And thus has bound me to Him.

## **2. THE MAINTENANCE OF LOVE. — Luke 10: 38-42.**

We have seen how love for Christ is awakened, and blessed indeed when at the outset of the Christian life the heart is won for Christ. We have now to learn how the heart, in which love has been awakened, can be maintained in the freshness of first love.

Do we not all know that, with the passing of time, many things may creep in between the soul and Christ? Not always gross things, which indeed might arrest the soul by the very wretchedness they bring, but things that are small and apparently harmless, — "the little foxes that spoil the vines," and render the life unfruitful. The allowance of these little things will cast a chill over the affections, and gradually form an icy crust over the heart, and the Lord has to say to us, "Thou hast left thy first love." Thus from one cause and another we often see, while love to Christ has been truly awakened in souls, some make little progress in spiritual intelligence whereas others grow in deeper acquaintance with the Lord and His mind. How, then, is the love, that has been awakened, to be maintained?

Will not the home at Bethany supply the answer? In the two sisters we have two saints in whom love to Christ has been truly awakened; yet in one sister we see a believer growing in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, while in the other sister we see a saint who is hindered by self and hampered by her service.

Martha's love was shown by seeking to meet the physical necessities of the Lord as a Man. Mary's love was seen in seeking to gratify the deep longings of His heart by hearing His word.

Martha was occupied with the "many things" which all have their end in death. Mary was

occupied with the "one thing" that death could not take from her. One has said, "No attention, even to Himself in the flesh, though it were from one that loved Him and whom He loved, could replace this. The 'many things' end only in disappointment and death, instead of leading into life eternal, as did the words of Jesus, issuing from a heart broken that it might let forth the stream of life."

If, then, we would know how *love is awakened*, we must in spirit visit the home of Simon; but would we know how *love is maintained*, let us visit the house at Bethany. Standing at the feet of the Saviour, in the house of Simon, love was awakened in the heart of a sinner; sitting at the feet of the Master, in the home of Martha, love was maintained. At His feet we are in His company; in His company we hear His words, and His words declare His heart. There we are learners in the school of love. How much do we know of the good part chosen by Mary — the turning aside from the busy round of life, and the activities of service to be alone with Jesus, and more, to draw nigh to Jesus for the love of being near Him? The Lord loves our company; He delights to have us in His presence. He may dispense with our busy service, but He cannot do without ourselves. Thus only will first love be maintained, and if lost regained. We cannot live on the past. Past experiences may have awakened love, but only present communion can maintain love.

### 3. THE DEEPENING OF LOVE. — John 11.

Passing now to another incident in the story of Mary of Bethany, we shall learn another lesson in the story of love. If in Luke 10 we have seen how love is *maintained* in the common round of life, in John 11 we shall learn how love is *deepened* in the sorrows of life. There life was flowing in its usual channel, here the everyday life is arrested by a great sorrow. Sickness has invaded the Bethany circle, and the shadow of death is creeping over the home. In the trial that has overtaken them how will the sisters act? Moved by grace they take the best possible course. *They draw upon the love of Christ*. In Luke 10 Mary is learning the love of Christ in the calm of a quiet life; in John 11 she is drawing upon that love amidst the storms of life. There she enjoyed His love in His company; here she uses His love in her sorrow. All this is writ plainly in the appeal that these devoted women make to the Lord. They send to Him saying, "He whom Thou lovest is sick" (verse 2). How brightly the faith and confidence in the Lord of these two sisters shines out in this brief message. They turn to the right Person, for "they sent unto *Him*." They use the right plea, for they say "Lord, behold, he whom *Thou lovest* is sick." They plead, not the feeble love of Lazarus for the Lord, but the perfect and unfailing love of the Lord for Lazarus. So, too, they appeal to the Lord in the right way, for they do not suggest what the Lord shall do; they neither ask the Lord to heal, nor to come, nor even to speak a word on their behalf. They simply spread out their sorrow before the Lord and cast themselves upon the boundless resources of unbounded love. Will love disappoint them? Ah, no! For love delights to respond to the appeal of hearts moved by love.

However, love divine will take its perfect way. A way indeed that to mere nature may seem passing strange. The sisters have delighted His heart by drawing upon His love; now He will delight their hearts by deepening in their souls the sense of His love, and thus deepening their love for Him. For it is ever thus, the deeper the sense of His love, the deeper will be the response of our love. We love Him because He first loved us.

To accomplish His gracious work He will use the sorrows of life, and, that His love may be deepened in their souls, He will first deepen the sorrow. The saints are called to the glory of God after they have "suffered awhile" (2 Peter 5: 10); so, on our way to glory, we often catch some brighter rays of His glory after a time of suffering. It was thus with the sisters. They had to suffer awhile, for the

Lord tarries, and no word comes from the Lord. The days are passing, Lazarus is sinking, the shadow of death is creeping over the home. At last death has come; Lazarus is dead. They have suffered awhile; they shall now see His glory — for "this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." To sight it was for death, in reality death was being used to bring into display the glory of Christ and swell the triumph of His victory over death. To accomplish these great ends, how perfect the way He takes.

Human love, thinking only of the relief of the sick one, would have started at once for Bethany. Human prudence, thinking only of self, would never have gone, even as the disciples say, "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone Thee; and goest Thou thither again." The Lord, rising above human love, and human prudence, acts according to divine love moved by divine wisdom. "As for God, His way is perfect."

After patience has had her perfect work; in love's due time, the Lord comes to the bereaved sisters at Bethany, and reveals the deep love of His heart, as He talks with them, and walks with them, and weeps with them. He is going to deepen their love by His words of love, and ways of love, and tears of love. What depths of love lie behind those sublime words, "Jesus wept." It was a wonderful sight to see a sinner weeping in the presence of His love, but more wonderful to see the Saviour weeping in the presence of our sorrow. That we should weep because of our sins is a small wonder; that He should weep because of our sorrows is a great wonder — a wonder that discloses how near He came, and *how near He is* to a sorrowing saint.

Why, we may ask, these tears? The Jews, standing round the grave, misinterpret the tears, for they say, "Behold how He loved him!" Truly, the Lord loved Lazarus, but the tears were not the expression of His love for Lazarus. The sisters may weep for the loss of their brother; there was, however, no need for the Lord to weep for one He was about to raise. It was not for the dead He wept, but for the living — not for the loss of Lazarus, but for the sorrow of Mary and Martha. In a little, love will raise Lazarus, but first love will weep with Martha and Mary. He broke His heart to bind up our hearts, and shed His tears to dry our tears. In so doing He declared His love and deepens our love. Thus He uses the trials, the sorrows, and the rough ways of life to unfold the treasures of His love, and draw out our love to Him.

After this great trial the sisters would surely have said, "We knew that He loved us, but, until the trial came, we never knew that He loved us so much as to walk with us and weep with us in the trial."

At His feet, in Luke 10, Mary was learning His love; in John 11 she draws upon the love of which she had learned, and is deepened in the love that she draws upon.

What holy happy lessons can we learn from these different scenes. We learn that at the feet of Jesus, as sinners, love is awakened; at the feet of Jesus, as learners, love is maintained; and at the feet of Jesus, in our sorrows, love is deepened.