

The Two Debtors

Luke 7: 36-50.

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Article 33 of 47 **Short Meditations**

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Present full assurance of soul is the spring of the purest affection and of the freest service. Indeed it is necessary to each of them. The present forgiveness of sins is to be asserted with all confidence.

I ask, What has been the business of the blessed God in this world of ours, if not for the very end of putting us into such a condition? Our *sin* brought Him here — and then, *the putting away of our sin* gave Him His history here, after He had come among us. He died and rose from the dead. For what do I see in that history, the death and resurrection of the Son of God, if I see not the putting away of sin?

As soon as ever sin entered, He was revealed in *this* connection with us. Not as a Lawgiver or a Judge, but as a Saviour. He is seen in the very first promise. It was as a Saviour, as the Purger of sins, He was revealed then, in the mystery of the bruised heel and the bruised head — and that was His death and resurrection as the Son of God and the Lamb of God. And what, again I ask, do I see in those great facts, if I see not the putting away of sin? How can I, with any reason, with any simplicity of mind, stand before the Cross of Christ, and not apprehend the purging of sins there? If I did not apprehend that, every thing would and must rebuke the darkness of my soul. Did not the rent veil accompanied by the rent rocks of the earth and the riven graves of the saints, tell out, that the death of the Son of God then accomplished had restored man to God, casting up a highway from the prison-house of him who had the power of death up to the bright heavens, and the throne of the majesty there? Did not the empty sepulchre follow in its appointed day, to bear like witness, and to tell that God was satisfied with the death of Christ, and that it had atoned for sin and made reconciliation? And then, did not the gift and presence of the Holy Ghost come, in its due pentecostal hour, to seal the same great fact? And I further ask, What was the preaching, the Gospel, the testimony of the Apostles immediately afterwards, as we have it in the Book of the Acts? Surely it is, remission, forgiveness of sins, upon the virtue of the blood or death of Jesus, to all who will receive Him. Peter, in his first word in Acts 2, and then in his second word in Acts 3, and in his earliest testimony to the Gentiles at Caesarea in Acts 10, rehearses this great fact — and when Paul takes up the testimony, he takes up — the same wondrous tale, as we see in Acts 13. And in their Epistles, where they teach rather than preach, instructing the saints rather than arousing sinners, we find the same, the Epistle to the Hebrews making it one of its great characteristic businesses, to show us the Purger of our sins now in the highest heavens, in the midst of His own many glories there.

All this is truly and indeed so. And now, our souls are to keep this blessed fact, that sin is put away, as in the foreground. It is not to be treated as something which we might be able to descry in the hazy, misty distance, after some anxious scrutiny. It is to be set in the foreground, where the rent veil the resurrection, the pentecost, apostolic preaching and apostolic teaching have already set it, that we may apprehend it as in the very light of noonday, and possess ourselves of it with all assurance.

Scripture, as one once observed, makes a much simpler thing of the putting away of sin, than our religion makes of it. Scripture puts it at the outset, human religion makes it the great attainment. Scripture puts sin in company with the blood of Christ, and it disappears.

We may grant by the way, that when the grace of God which bringeth salvation, and which had shone out so brightly in the first promise, and had maintained its place through the age of the Patriarchs, gets connected, under Moses, with the Law, it becomes clouded. Naturally so, I might say, for it is then mixed up with a foreign element. The forgiveness of sins, God's own provision for the state of the guilty, had a large and various testimony there, I grant; but that testimony, was borne by shadows and ordinances and religions official services, which either clouded or incumbered it. The whole Mosaic economy had important ends to answer — but as far as grace was concerned, it clogged and obscured the actions and manifestations of it. Grace did not appear in its simplicity, as in patriarchal days. And according to this, the New Testament, in its Divine reasoning and commentaries, commonly sets the Gospel of grace *in company with the Patriarchs*, but *in contrast with Moses*. Abraham was blessed as a believing Abraham; Moses put a veil on his face, and the law is declared to have gendered a spirit of bondage to fear.

But grace, at length, emerges from this mixed element, this clouded atmosphere; and now, ascertained and effectuated by the death and resurrection of Christ, it shines, as we have seen, in its infinite brightness, and claims to occupy the chief place in Christianity, and the very foreground in the sight and apprehension of our souls.

From the different purpose and character of each of them, we find this truth, the forgiveness of sins, variously presented to us in *the Gospels*, in *the Acts*, and in *the Epistles*. We have it *preached* to sinners in the Acts: we have it *taught* or expounded to believers in the Epistles: and we have it *illustrated* in individuals in the Gospels. The Spirit, as I may say, is an Evangelist or a Preacher in the Acts; a Teacher of the saints in the Epistles; and in the Gospels we get living narratives, illustrative of what is elsewhere thus preached and taught.

How simply is this leading truth, the forgiveness of sins on the authority and in the name of the death and resurrection of Christ, *preached* in the Acts. Peter begins testimony to that, and repeats it again and again, as we have already said, and Paul continues it.

How largely and forcibly the same truth is *expounded* to us in such Epistles as the Romans and the Hebrews, shown to us in the stability of the foundation on which it rests, and in the glories in which it results — all the Epistles, I may say, assuming it!

And how affectingly is the power of the same truth in the soul of one who receives it, *illustrated* in this narrative of the Sinner of the city in the house of Simon the Pharisee, at the close of Luke 7!

This is so indeed. And sweet is this varied method of presenting this great leading truth. We have it preached to sinners, expounded and opened to believers, illustrated in individuals.

In this house of Simon the Pharisee, the Lord comes in contact with two persons, representatives of two moral generations. I mean, His host, and a sinner of the city. And these constitute the two debtors in the parable which the Lord delivers on the occasion, and which is found in the bosom of the narrative.

Simon I look upon as one who surely owned the excellence of the Lord Jesus. He had invited Him into his house as a mark of honour. He was one, too, I doubt not who would daily own the debt of thankful gratitude for the blessings of God's care and mercy, and know himself to be less than the least of them. He was as one who had been forgiven fifty pence.

The sinner who had now entered his house, most surely was a sinner; but she knew herself to be such. But Jesus was a Saviour; and she knew Him to be such. She was not merely convicted, so as to be confounded and ready to surrender every thing; she was consciously forgiven, as after conviction. She

was in a day of grace, out of judgment. She was not, like David of old, before the Angel of God with a drawn sword in his hand. She was before Him as her salvation — not in the sense merely of providential mercies, but of eternal acceptance. She was as a debtor who had been forgiven five hundred pence.

Such, I believe, was this woman, this sinner of the city, and, in the midst of the narratives in the Evangelists, she illustrates the virtues and victories which accompany the knowledge of forgiveness.

It made her bold. She ventured, sinner as she was, into the house of a Pharisee. It was very bold of her. She might have counted on the very thing she got — contempt and injurious whisperings, the murmurings of self-righteous reproach. And what she might have counted on she got.

It made her happy. That made her independent of the creature, and set her above the world. *It put into her the spirit of sacrifice and of worship.* All that she was and had was not good enough or rich enough for the One who had saved her, who had loved her and given Himself for her. She brought all with her to the feet of Jesus, and cared not that any should be conscious of her but Himself. She was reading the new name on the white stone. The Pharisee's thoughts of scorn were lost upon her; as Michal's reproaches had been lost upon David in a moment of kindred joy. She had her all in Jesus, and got her answer to all from Jesus.

She was one who knew the great leading characteristic truth of Christianity, as we have said, the forgiveness of sins. "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." She knew Jesus as Simon did not. She stood in another relationship to Him. He was before her as her Saviour. Simon took but very poor and partial account of her. He could not understand her, and that which he knew, he knew altogether in a way that deceived him. He said to himself, that "she was a sinner." To be sure she was. None but a sinner could render such sacrifices as she was then offering. But Simon did not know that her sinner-character was really the root and ground of all he was then witnessing. Nor did he know his Guest either. He doubted that He could be a prophet — but He soon let him know, that He was not merely a prophet, but a prophet of a Divine order, who could tell him the secret workings of his own heart. He said that the woman *ouched* the Lord. "Was that all, Simon?" we might say to him. Surely the whole action was lost on him, for he did not understand it. The kisses and the tears and the treasures of the alabaster box he saw as if he saw not. The fifty pence was far away indeed from measuring the five hundred.

Surely this is so — and this I receive as the characteristic, lesson of this little narrative, and of the parable it carries in the midst of it. It illustrates the value of the soul having right thoughts of its relationship to God, the value of knowing that we are sinners, sinners hopelessly, eternally self-ruined, but that Jesus is nothing less to us than a present Saviour, a perfect Saviour, a Saviour for eternity.

The Gospel, amid the multitude of moral glories which shine in it, has this, that it forms the most wondrous and precious link between God and His creatures, a link which, in its different way, is inestimable both to the Giver and the receiver — the work of salvation with all its results on God's part, and responsive grateful love on the sinner's — the highest benefit to the most distant and undeserving.

Angels have kept their first estate, formed as they were in excellency of strength and brightness; and their original, their "first estate," as it is called, being thus kept, is the link between them and their Creator. Adam's innocency, as we may admit for a moment, kept him in his connection with God as a creature formed upright, to walk in the garden of Eden. But what are such links as these in comparison with that which grace has formed in the great system of salvation?

And how, then, does it become our duty, our very obedience, our service, to entertain rich and

sure thoughts of the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of God! Affection will then return to Him after the pattern of this sinner of the city. And how Divinely beautiful and wondrous, surely I may say, is that Book which opens by exhibiting the link of *innocency* between the Lord God and His creatures, and closes by exhibiting that of *salvation!* The Lamb's wife in glory will love as Adam in the garden could not have loved. She will love, I may take leave to say, after the pattern of this woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee. She will love in the strength and joy of that grace which has forgiven five hundred pence.

And indeed I judge that I can say, I know not that any one, in the progress of Scripture from the very beginning of it to the very end, has illustrated the affection of the Bride of the Lamb more deeply and affectingly than she has done. The family at Bethany and Mary Magdalene express very fervent personal affection. Their hearts were attracted and drawn and detained very beautifully. One greatly enjoys the sights we get of them. And I may say, that the moral power which lies in the sense of forgiveness and acceptance is finely exhibited in the early gathering of believers at Jerusalem in Acts 2. And likewise, that David in Psalm 32, and Isaiah in Isaiah 6 of his prophecy, and repentant Israel, as anticipated in Isaiah 53 and Micah 7, among a multitude beside, set forth some very fine emotions of the soul under the fresh sense of pardon and reconciliation. And so, Peter and Matthew and Zaccheus, and the Samaritan in the days of the Evangelists, and Paul afterwards, as he delineates the condition of his heart towards the Lord Jesus, in Gal. 2: 19-21. All this is so; and all these cases give us great samples of the power of the sense of forgiveness. But again I say, I know not that anywhere we get so affecting an illustration of this, as in this sinner of the city in Luke 7. She presents to us the full measure and the perfect way, in which, at times, the sense of forgiveness and the consciousness of acceptance seizes upon the whole soul, commanding it with unquestioned, unrivalled authority, laying its easy and welcome yoke upon every thing, and filling the spirit with the richest and most generous affections.

What will it be, to have hearts for eternity in the possession of such a joy as these conditions secure to them!

There are, however, incidental or secondary lessons in this little narrative. We see in it, or we learn by it, that all is to reappear in due time and place. The services of the woman and the neglects of Simon are all remembered by the Lord at the last. All seemed to have been passed over, at the time the things were either done or left undone; but it was not so. And this illustrates an interesting, serious truth. Nothing is of no importance, but every thing has a character, a moral character in it, while there are balances now hid in the sanctuary of God that are destined to weigh it by-and-by. As here — the kisses and the tears and the service of the hair of the head, and the fragrant treasures of the alabaster box, which had marked the previous way of this loving woman, with the corresponding neglects of the Pharisees, are all rehearsed by the Lord Himself at a moment when perhaps both of them were unaware — as it is written, "The Lord of that servant shall come in a day that he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of."

This may be laid to heart. Have we been rendering *secret* service to Christ? Have we any interest in the day of the manifestation of all things? How stand we in relation to that day? I put not these as questions of life, but as godly appeals to my own heart and ways, that present doings may be set in the light of coming days.

And again in this instructive story. At the end the Lord publishes the salvation of the woman in the face of all those who were sitting at meat with Him. He puts His own broad, authoritative seal upon the fact that she was forgiven, as in the presence of the whole world, let there be what accusing

thoughts or unbelieving questionings there may be. "Thy sins are forgiven," the Lord says to her — "and they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" What a voice upon the waters that of Jesus must have been! The waters were swelling again — the winds and the waves of Galilee were abroad — but the voice of Jesus had again risen. The whispers and the accusings were not heard by the woman. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." This was enough for her.*

*Simon was not of that generation of Pharisees who laid snares for the Lord, like him of Luke 11; but neither was he of one generation with Levi, who when he made a feast for Jesus, set publicans and sinners in His company.

But then, in turning from her accusers to herself, the Lord changes His voice. The fruit of forgiveness may be, and is, love, but the root and spring of forgiveness is faith. It was not her love, ardent and self-surrendering as it was, which had saved her. Her faith had gone before her salvation, ere this scene had opened; love now comes after it, as we have been seeing. And according to all this, when He now turns from her accusers to herself, He says, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." No mention of love or what love had done, in company with salvation. Salvation is of grace, in company with the blood of Christ and the faith that apprehends and leans upon that blood. Salvation is too high a thing to stand on a level with the works of man. It is God's work, and it comes "to him that worketh not," as saith the Apostle. "It is of faith, that it might be by grace."

And let me add, that she who is principal in the Book of the Canticles represents the same generation to which this woman belonged. She stands above the daughters of Jerusalem, as this one does above Simon the Pharisee. She had discovered that "she was black yet comely," and that was the secret of her earnest, longing affection. She thus reminds us of the elect one in the Canticles, and she foreshadows, in her affection, the Lamb's wife. She stands as between, them, and they all belong to one generation. "I am black but comely," expresses the secret of such affection. It is the joy and the love of consciously pardoned and accepted sinners that fills the spirit of the one in the Canticles, of this poor sinner of the city, and of the Bride-companion, the sister and the Spouse, the wife of the Lamb for ever.