

The Sinner Saved

Luke 7: 36-50.

W. Kelly.

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Immediately before the deeply affecting interview between our Lord and the woman that was a notorious sinner in the town into which He had passed, we have Him pronouncing on the moral state of mankind — more particularly of those that had the word of God, the Jews. For we must remember that among such our Lord was manifested. They were not, like the heathen, ignorant of the scriptures. They were entrusted with that great privilege, and professed to prize and preached the word. They had no excuse on the ground of sitting in darkness. All the word of God then revealed was theirs; and yet what could compare with that generation, as the Lord says? John the Baptist they did not like: he was too strict for them. And when the Son of Man, the Saviour Himself, followed, they called Him by still more shameful names: — He was too loose for them. Thus, it does not matter what may be the testimony God gives, man has always some reason for refusing.

"But wisdom is justified of all her children." In the Gospel of Matthew wisdom is justified of her children, because the Lord there welcomes the weary and heavy-laden that come to Him, and gives them rest. But Luke was led to specify in the Pharisee's house the guilty woman of the city. It is in truth the Lord anticipating what God was going to do in the gospel everywhere. So he says, "Wisdom is justified of all her children." Who could have expected that henceforth a child of wisdom was to be found in a notorious child of folly? This was her known and evil character; but when God drew her to the feet of Jesus, all was changed. Such is the power of His grace in Jesus. And He has taken care that this admirable fountain shall not be closed, having employed Luke thus to point it out in His word. Who else would have thought of a robber reconciled to God on the cross? who of a sinful woman picked out from the mass of human beings? a reprobate character saved by faith and sent away in peace?

"But wisdom is justified of all her children." The robber vindicated the wisdom of, God; for he confessed the Messiah when the High Priest, the Roman Procurator, and the Tetrarch of Galilee, in that day, mocked, rejected, and condemned the Lord and Saviour. That robber gave the lie to the wisdom of the world.

People thought not a little of education in those days; and they think a great deal more of it nowadays; but where were the "cultured"? Not on the side of Jesus, but against Him. The robber had nothing to boast on that score; but he justified the wisdom of God against all the pride, knowledge, power, and glory of man. They all rejected the Lord to their own everlasting shame and ruin. The robber at the last moment was saved; only then he became wise, for he had been Satan's dupe all his life before; but how gracious that divine wisdom which can take up its abode in the breast of a hardened criminal at the last!

And here was a woman that no decent person had the smallest acquaintance with, who had sunk into the depths of depravity; here is this woman brought forward to vindicate divine wisdom in another way altogether. There are two characteristics of human wickedness. The one is violence; the other is corruption. The woman clearly was a sample of corruption, as the robber of violence. But the distinctive truth of the gospel is, that redemption depends not upon what you bring to the Redeemer, but on what God gives in and from Him. There is not a single quality in your heart or life that could

commend you to God; nay, if you read them in the light of God, you would yourself condemn all. "But God commendeth His love toward us [not ours towards Him], in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

It was impossible to give a greater proof of love than dying for His enemies, and enemies in mind by wicked works, not merely through some mistaken cause or misunderstanding. Sinners, because powerless, are the very persons God takes up and saves; therefore let no person whatever, man or woman, aged or youthful say, "I am too bad to be saved." It is just because you are so bad that you need such a Saviour. Therefore does Jesus bring God's saving grace to you. He does not expect any good from you as you are. You must first receive the blessing; then, as Luke proceeds to set forth, when the grace of the Saviour is applied, when the heart bows to Him, His grace transforms the man or woman so that he or she becomes a totally different person. Yet not the transformation saves, but only Christ; and this gives the entire glory to God. If it were the good the Christian afterwards does that saves the soul, it would be man reaping the glory

But it is not so. Since the fall, man is altogether bad, as well as guilty. God no doubt works a great change in the heart that receives the Lord Jesus; but it is not his new moral qualities, not the difference of his life practically, that procures salvation, nothing but Jesus; and therefore by believing on Jesus. For only the sovereign grace of God, coming down to man in Christ His own Son, could save the sinner from his sins and from the judgment of God. This we are here given to know; as God has written it for the purpose.

If the story of this woman were quite exceptional, we should not have it presented as it is. Many things of great moment took place that were not historically recorded in Scripture. For instance, at the beginning of the Bible, we have not a single word about the creation of angels. Man would have put it there if he had written a Bible, instead of God alluding incidentally elsewhere as to an already accomplished fact. For God, in writing the Bible through inspired witnesses, does not state when He made angels. Why not? Because it does not fall within His design to disclose it as history. And to this faith always adheres. Let us then not doubt that what God reveals is at the right time and place, not otherwise. So here we do not find the new and blessed effects of grace in the woman, real as they were, enlarged upon. It must have done souls harm. They would fall from grace in seeking to first acquire good qualities. Even as it is souls too often strive to win for themselves a good character in order to be pardoned, and thereby Christ and His work are annulled.

Scripture simply presents the Saviour, and in the background the host that invited Him into his house, a man without faith, though a Pharisee. A woman also came there uninvited, the last person seemingly to be attracted by the grace of Jesus. But God showers grace on souls that least deserve it. What a witness is here of the way of grace with one that had been altogether abandoned to evil! Is it not enough to enlarge our thoughts of God and to humble the pride of human nature? Where in the Gospels did grace produce more beautiful and deep effects, or more immediately, than in this poor woman without a character? What produced it will produce it again. The woman was the object of mercy; the transforming power was Christ. Indelible was the impression that the Saviour made on that woman's heart, and the consequence was that His reflection shone out in her ways. It would be hard to find greater humility, a clearer repentance, or a more devoted heart. And this all wrought so soon! How great must be, therefore, the efficacy of the Saviour's grace! This is what God commends. It is indeed His own love to the sinner; and faith can commend it not only to any hitherto unconverted, but to the converted that hesitate. What a reproof for any, converted or not, to be left behind by such a woman!

Let us then look into the Holy Spirit's account of this transaction. Simon, the Pharisee, asked the

Lord to his house. No doubt he thought he was acting in a generous manner. But while the Lord and the company were there, a stranger entered — "a woman in the city that was a sinner." Those terms are sufficiently emphatic. They do not mean a sinner in the ordinary or broad sense that we all sinned, but in that peculiar force which made the woman notorious in the town; and everybody knows what this is. What drew her? Jesus, nothing but Jesus.

The first thing for your attention is that God does not make the path of faith an easy one. His word is truth, His call is simple, so far as the message is concerned. He uses all plainness of speech to sinners, no matter where they be. But there are always difficulties for the soul. There is a lion in the way of every one that believes in the Lord Jesus. The Destroyer tries to hinder, just as much as there is a Saviour that loves to save. The "lion" in the way of the woman was that Jesus was "at meat" in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Such a man, having no faith in God's grace always stands upon morality or forms or both. The man that prided himself on his religion would be exceedingly disgusted with an immoral woman coming into his house, especially when he had company.

What emboldened the woman to go there and then? Apply it to your own case. Supposing a party invited to dinner, what would you feel at the intrusion of a worthless character, especially a woman of scandalous life? There is not a single man from a lord to a labourer but would feel that his castle, great or small, was invaded. Would not the labourer be as indignant as the lord? Nor was the intruder insensible in the least; yet grace drew her notwithstanding, and gave her the needed courage to go at all cost. Whose grace? Her own? It was Christ's — entirely and exclusively the attractive power of His goodness. She felt herself so much in distress about her sins, so much in earnest to cast her burden on the Saviour, that she said as it were to herself, "There is only One that can aid me; He who has been giving sight to the blind, and strength to the lame; He who cleanses the leper, and bids the paralytic rise; He who has been blessing even a Gentile and healing his servant; He who quickened a dead man as he was carried to the grave, might perhaps deign to speak pardon to a depraved and wretched woman like me.

What was the way of grace with her soul? The good news of Him by the Holy Spirit touched the springs of her heart, so that her awakened conscience could not but go with guilt to His feet. When it is but an idea or a feeling, there is not such earnestness of purpose. Shame, fear, pride, etc., outweigh and turn aside. Naturally the woman might have thought the difficulties insuperable, the moment most inopportune. What would the Pharisee say and do at such a liberty on her part? And the holy Saviour! How could she venture to go near Him, especially in such circumstances as these? "Ah, but" (whispered the still small voice to her) "there may never be another opportunity. You may never see or hear Him again. Go now; seek Him at once." Sense of need in herself and of grace in Him silenced every doubt and refused yielding to any fear. Not a moment must be lost. Her sins, her grievous sins, drove her to Him. He was there; Pharisee, disciples, all the world, could not keep her back from the Only One that availed her. She was in good earnest. Are you, my dear friend? Yet you know you have sins on your conscience warning you of God's judgment for evermore? How awful to put off, to make excuse, to trifle with His grace! For is not the Saviour always passing by when you hear the gospel? Do you neglect so great salvation? Is He not near to everyone of us? You are called to go neither to the heavens nor into the depths to find Him. "The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart which we preach. . . . that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

I remember a friend that was saved by these very words, and a remarkable man he was, one most acceptable in a certain city in the north of England. Private and public dinners were not quite complete in the place without him. He was the man for a good story and a bright song, able to enter genially into

all that occupied the company. But he was utterly without God, living only for this world, pleasing himself and other people, but with no sense of sin, and no care for God. He had a friend who was rather an imitator of this. You know there are many imitative wits, but not many original ones. Now this friend was regarded as of the former class and passed off jokes like the latter in his humble way. The lesser had a grave brother who was the constant butt of the greater's pleasantry.

One day the greater met the grave man, and asked him "How is your brother"? The grave man looked graver still and said, "He is saved." The effect was as though a chasm opened at his feet. He was astonished at the answer and the fact alleged. He had never heard of such a thing in his life before. A man saved! particularly a man he knew, who had no more thought of God than himself, not the least concern for his salvation, but living in pleasure and vanity! When he recovered his breath, he asked how that was. Why, said the grave man, do you not know the scripture? quoting the words from Romans. "You do not mean to say that is in the Bible," said he. Some that do not read the word of God, when once arrested, are much more affected than those only reading it as a duty. This shows how carelessly men read: it ought not to be; but it is a common fact. The words seemed to him wondrous. He apparently had not heard them before, though of course he had; he did not remember the words because he knew nothing of the truth conveyed by them. Asking where was this passage, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved," he was told the epistle, chapter, and verse. As soon as his public position permitted, he got alone with God, and did not leave his retirement until he by the faith of Christ was brought to Himself.

That man lived a devoted Christian, an excellent and earnest preacher of the gospel, and departed to be with Christ but a short time ago. The story may show that what God describes in the Bible is going on day by day. Do not think it is something out of your reach, or not urgent on you now. Why should this man and that woman be saved, and you not? Why should you turn a deaf ear to those gracious words of God, mighty to save? Why not follow the converted robber, or the abandoned woman, brought out of all their iniquity to God? Alas! there are men and women too proud, as themselves say, to be saved in the same way as either. But, my friends, have you no fear of being lost with the other robber? There are only two ways, like the two robbers, the one lost and the other saved. Are you then too proud to be saved with the believing robber, but not too proud to be lost with the impenitent robber? What is this but supreme folly, madness, and sin? Is it not the blinding power of the enemy, God's enemy and yours?

Think of their endless doom who thus live and die; think now of that awful companionship through all eternity. Think on the other hand of the blessed on high, many no doubt taken out of the gutters of this world, out of all their wallowing in open wickedness or selfish frivolity and pleasure, yea out of darkness and evil and ungodliness even when veiling themselves in a vain mantle of religion. Oh what a blessed portion "to be with Christ" in the blessed throng! The word declares that the Lord Jesus gives eternal life for heaven, and will adjudge to hell. All depends on how you treat the Lord Jesus. Those who believe God honour His Son. See how this woman bore herself toward Him. She was aroused in conscience, drawn in heart, and so filled with good courage that she appears not to have thought of the Pharisee or of any one else in the house but the One on Whom her soul was concentrated. She sought only the Saviour, caring not for aught else that she might be saved. She went because of her sense of her sins and utter ruin. She knew how unable she was to resist temptation and refuse sin; she knew that, having sinned habitually and in the face of shame, she would go on, sinning to the end. Without Him she could do nothing.

But what about you? It is not a question what kind of sin is committed. It is very encouraging for

the soul that the Saviour does not disdain the grossest sinner, the most unworthy man or woman. This ought to encourage you. If you say, "I have not been so bad a sinner as that," remember that it is not the gross sinners merely that are cast into hell but *sinner*s, whatever the sort or degree of sin theirs may be; and without doubt you are not saved, unless you receive Christ by the Holy Ghost for your soul. This is what the woman did; and mark her conduct. Assuredly she showed her faith by her works: this is always God's way. It is not that works could save of themselves for a moment; but faith working by love is most acceptable to God. This is the kind of works the epistle of James speaks of. Therein are specified two examples, Abraham, and Rahab.

Now it is plain that the work of Abraham, if it had not been of faith, would have been the worst possible. Can you conceive an act so evil as for him to have offered up his son Isaac with his own hands, unless it had been a trial of his faith in the words of God? And what does the Holy Spirit tell us of Rahab? She received the spies that came to destroy her king and country. This would have been another execrable work, if it had not been bowing to God in faith. The one and only thing that made it acceptable to God, was that He was leading His people, and she knew it and was obedient. This was the difference between her and every other in Jericho. Rahab alone had faith in the living God of Israel, and this saved herself and her family. As Abraham gave up to God's will the resistance of all natural affections in the sacrifice of his son, assured that God would give Isaac back, so with Rahab and her feelings of patriotic duty. She would have been shocked at the idea of entertaining the spies if she had not seen the authority of God at stake. Was she to fight against God? It is the same God fully revealed in Christ Who has to do with you now.

God in view of eternity is calling on you to hear Christ's word, even commanding to believe the name of His Son (1 John 3: 23), yea commanding men everywhere to repent. And how can one truly show repentance? By turning away from all sins and self in the sight of God. The attempt to avoid evil and get good by watching and praying, by reading the word of God and taking the sacrament, is not repentance. It is a religious but unbelieving abuse of scripture and of those institutions of God. What is there more blessed than the word of God and prayer, than baptism and the Lord's supper, in their proper places and for their right ends? But if one make them the means of salvation, putting them in place of the Saviour, it is only less evil than the worship of the mass, and prayer to the virgin and the saints, or anything alike idolatrous.

But God, rich in mercy toward sinners, drew the woman that was a sinner, to the Lord Jesus. Who else could meet her guilt and shame and misery? And we are told that she brought with her an alabaster box or flask of ointment. It is better to say unguent (for when men speak of "ointment," not a few think of provision for a wound or sore). It was a precious unguent fit for a king's use. But those unhappy women, living by their shameless ways, often spend recklessly on their faces in order to recommend their persons. It is not said she bought the unguent for the purpose, but that she "brought" it. One can scarce doubt that she bought it for her own purposes. All was now changed. It was the most precious thing she had in the world, and therefore she brought it with a full heart for Jesus. She did not consult the apostles nor ask the virgin Mary. Yet nothing could be more comely, or appropriate, than her conduct. Who taught her? The Spirit of God. It was because her heart was opened to the power of the grace of Jesus. She needed no tongue of man to tell her now. In the depths of her soul she knew by the teaching of God's Spirit that there was none to compare with Jesus; and she was right.

This entirely changed all her thoughts and affections. Christ was now her life, however little she understood it, transforming accordingly her character, and forming new ways. Instead of being as formerly the brazen-faced woman, henceforth she became modest and humble. Christ made her forget herself altogether — a thing otherwise impossible to any; and how in contrast with all her life before!

Why should we wonder? Such is the true and spontaneous effect of Christ on the soul that believes on Him. Who could fail to observe the marked change? and all the more because she forgot the others and hid herself behind the Lord Jesus.

Up to that day she sought the eye of men; now she thought of none but that Saviour. What now were any other eyes to her? Time was when she planted herself boldly and tried to catch if she could get the least admiration from anyone; but now for her soul "Jesus only"! And when she ventured in with her cruse of unguent, she stood behind at His feet weeping. What an unexpected marvel of moral beauty! It was the life of Christ manifesting itself in suited ways. She was standing as a penitent behind Him. Never did she think of coming before His face? She did not reason on it; but in truth *He* could give peace behind, just as readily *as* in front. Behind *was her* place. She knew by a divinely given instinct that He Who gave eyes to the blind and raised the dead would understand her need and distress and repentance. Yes, and she understood him better than by any human intelligence.

Alas! that any should wish to reduce the Lord Jesus as much as possible to the level of an ordinary man. "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also." The woman knew better, as she stood behind at His feet weeping. It is known, of course, that they did not sit on chairs as we do, but when taking their meals, lay reclining on couches with their feet stretched out for their convenience behind them. Thus the woman could reach Christ's feet readily, because they appearing without would be accessible to her as He lay reclining at table. Not only did she weep, but "began to wash His feet with tears." Who would have thought of this but a woman deeply feeling and changed from all her old ways? She also wiped His feet with the hairs of her head. Ah! how often had those hairs been like nets to catch loose and foolish men: now they were used to wipe the feet of Jesus. "And she kissed His feet, and anointed them with the unguent."

There were those who looked upon that scene with very different eyes. First of all turn to Simon: he had little estimate of the Lord when he asked Him to his house. This was plain enough in that he did not kiss Him (which was the usual mark of kindness in a host); nor did he give water for His feet, which was only common courtesy. He perhaps said to himself, "A man like that ought to feel highly honoured, if he is asked to my house, and I give him a dinner." But now that he saw a loose woman thus engaged, he was sure that Jesus could not be what he was thought. A prophet to his mind must be more rigid than a Pharisee; and assuredly a Pharisee would have walked on the other side of the road with a scowl at the woman, if he deigned to notice her at all. All turned in his mind against the Saviour. "He spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner." How far from the blessed truth that Jesus came for sinners, not for little only but for confessedly great sinners! Who can be conceived worse than "the lost"? What does it mean now, what by-and-by when God enters into judgment? Simon entirely missed the mind of God in his thought. He was like the Pharisees generally in the darkness of nature, whilst flattering himself that he was a guide of the blind and an instructor of the foolish.

The Lord proved that He was a prophet and infinitely more than a prophet. He read the man's heart as well as the woman's, and, yet more, He revealed God's love. Not that Simon uttered a word but thought his evil saying within himself. "And Jesus, answering," *i.e.*, the unuttered judgment of Simon's mind, "said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee," giving the parable of the two debtors, the great and the small. "And when they had nothing to pay, he [the creditor] frankly forgave them both. [Tell me] which of those therefore will love him most" (ver. 42). "I suppose," said Simon, "he to whom he forgave most." Thus did Simon unconsciously condemn himself and vindicate the grace of God. There was a man without real sense of sin, with no sense whatever of forgiveness and consequently without fear of God (Ps. 130: 4), to say nothing of love. There was the woman who truly

acknowledged her enormous debt in presence of grace. Her love was real and great; in faith she came to Him Who will in no wise cast out, and did not doubt that the great Saviour would look on the great sinner, compassionating even her; and so He did. "She loved much," Simon not at all. As our Lord said, Simon had rightly judged the truth in the abstract, but, having no faith, he hated and despised the Lord.

It was equally plain that the woman loved after a new and divine sort. What produced this? Faith in Jesus. Love without faith is of no account with God, absolutely worthless, merely human. Faith is the root, and love is the fruit as here. "And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment" (vers. 44-46).

O my friends, why not go and spread out your guilt before Him? Why tarry longer in willing bondage to Satan, when the Deliverer is near to save you? He knows all already, so that you may honestly confess all to the Lord. And how did she tell it? By her tears, her ways, her heart. Nor was she wrong. For He recognised the faith His own grace produced. The word of God speaks of *doing* the truth, as she did now. Words of truth are good; but acts are more powerful sometimes than any words of man. And there was the only Man that could read the heart and interpret it justly, truly, and graciously. This was everything to the woman, now turned from darkness to light, sanctified to God by faith in Christ, a jewel that will shine in His presence for evermore.

Dear souls, are you to be one of His to receive forgiveness and inheritance among .he sanctified like her? The only way is to be at His feet now, taking the place of the lost sinner at once. Doubt not His salvation by grace. It is not exactly saying that from a lost sinner you may be a saved sinner, but a sinner saved. There is no small difference between the two. A "saved sinner" is a common phrase, which might lead a man to think that he may sin after being saved without any ado; that God allows him quite naturally to go sinning and sinning. But the word to the family of God is, "we write unto you that ye sin not" (1 John. 2) For the sinner, when he obeys the call of God, becomes the saint, in other words a man separated from sin, the world, and Satan, unto God. Nobody denies that the old man is still there as a fact, but to his faith crucified with Christ, that he should not serve sin. But in himself what weakness, and how exposed to snares, and his path full of dangers! He is like one going through a furnace with his pockets full of powder. He needs a mighty Guide and Protector; and this and far more is Christ, on Whom God calls him to hang as a child clings to its mother. Without Him the Christian can do nothing acceptable to God — can bear no fruit.

We need, therefore, all through the journey to depend on the Saviour. So the Woman was doing — looking to the Saviour and to Him only. As she listened, what must have been her joy when she heard the Lord of heaven and earth, the Creator of the world, vindicate her and God's wisdom with that erring child of folly, now by His grace a child of wisdom evermore! Whatever may have been your folly, it is high time now to become a child of the wisdom that comes down from above. Beware of the earthly kind, earthly, sensual, devilish. What He was to the woman once so depraved, He will be even to you in the midst of your sins to deliver you from them. Do not wait to get a better character, but go as you are to the Lord. We do not know that this woman had been even the day before brought to hate herself and her sins. Even at the moment she entered the house, she was known only and significantly as "a sinner." What time or means or power of reform had she? No, it was Jesus attracted her; grace, yea God, she found in Him. It is the grace of the Lord Jesus that produced faith; and all that is good and holy follows: grace sees to it. Beyond doubt I am called to believe. If I believe not, I neither judge my sins and sinfulness, nor know the true God. Jesus is nothing to me. If I believe in Him, it is all mine;

and all yours if and when you believe in Him. How good is our God! He has sent His own Son to do the work of redemption, to suffer for our sins. So Christ applies the parable.

Do not confound this woman with Mary in John's Gospel (not named by Matthew and Mark). The one anointing took place at the end of the Lord's ministry, the other far earlier which Luke here records. The one was the anointing of Himself by a saint devoted to Him; the other by a sinner without a character, just being brought to God. They were wholly different facts. We do not find Mary of Bethany weeping over the Lord, or any sign of penitence there. If you speak of some resemblance, how could there but be, if divine love worked in the heart of either the lately abandoned woman or the long proved child of God? Some have supposed her to be Mary Magdalene. This is another of the fallacies of tradition, and irreconcilable with scripture. Mary of Magdala comes forward first in the next chapter (Luke 8) as a stranger. "And certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others." These are brought before us as altogether new persons. This Mary is nowhere spoken of as having been a woman of loose life; hers was the dreadful lot of having seven demons dwelling in her — an extremely awful case as a prey to the power of the devil, whether men believe it or not. Such is the difference that scripture makes between the two women.

To confound the penitent with Mary of Bethany, or Mary of Magdala, is one of those moral blunders theologians make with regard to the Bible, of which none would dream if dealing with any other book. Men let loose their fancy when they read or write on the Bible. They betray far less with other books. They like to lower God's book. Take up the Bible as a mere divinity student, and you will never understand it. You must approach God and it as a sinner. The scribe of this age, the "higher critic," is insensible and lost to all its blessing. The Bible judges man; but if I set up for such unworthy criticism, I am judging the Bible, which is the essence of infidelity; for who and what is man to judge God and His word? Yet this spirit of infidelity was never so rife as now in Christendom, and never before so abundant in Great Britain, to say nothing of less favoured lands, whatever some prophesy of a good time coming. It is a day of rebuke and blasphemy. It is an hour of many antichrists. The Word personal is humanised, no less than the written word. May grace give you who believe the love and reverence of the new born penitent!

The person who reads this divine story in faith gets a true and holy and profitable view of God's way with a sinner. The grace of the Lord does not tell us who the woman was. There are men and women curious to know all about her. What the Christian wants to learn is just what God reveals. The Lord threw a gracious veil over the woman's name. It is enough for us to know that, bad as she had been, grace saved her for ever; and this means a new life given, as well as propitiation made in due time. What edification for you or me or any to hear her name? We shall know her in heaven; we ought to see and admire the holy love which withholds her name, while disclosing her misdeeds sufficiently. We hear that her sins were "many." The Christian has not a good word to say about himself; and if you were known as God knows you, who would have a good word to say about you? Oh, let us have the very best word to say of the Saviour, as He warrants me to say His good words to you. Indeed the Lord is a Saviour in earnest and a friend in need; a Saviour to the uttermost and above all price. The love of Christ, how rich and true! It was His love which, by the action of the Holy Ghost, reproduced its like in the woman's heart.

To His host the Lord turned and said, "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins which are many are forgiven; for she loved much." The word "for" is sometimes a reason why, and sometimes an evidence why. In this case it is the evidential "for," not the causative. It was not because she loved much that the Lord forgave her. It was His grace that caused her love.

But there is more. "And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven." Without this declared to herself, how much would have been lost! It was a great thing to hear Him tell those that judged her and misjudged Him (which was far worse), "I say unto thee (Simon), Her sins, which are many, are forgiven"; but how much more when He deigned to turn round even to her and say, "Thy sins are forgiven!" And you think all this quite extraordinary; and so indeed it is. But let no one think himself a real Christian till he is in the enjoyment of this primary blessing of the gospel. For what is it but the Lord saying to you, not of course in a dream or in a transient feeling, but by the precious word which you receive from God, "Thy sins are forgiven?" How can you sing and praise with joyful heart if your sins are not forgiven? There can be no genuine thanksgiving, no cry to Abba Father, unless you know your sins forgiven. Until then, you dread God; and fear has torment; but when consciously forgiven on divine testimony, you rest on God's love to you in the Lord Jesus. Thenceforward, what matters anything the devil can insinuate? what man or woman say? or the world may frown?

It is impossible, some affirm (nay many a minister constantly teaches), that anyone can tell whether his sins are forgiven. Really one might think from such unbelieving ignorance that people had gone back to heathenism. Were there no Saviour, they could truly say it; and so they might, if there were no divinely inspired record of the Saviour. But for what is the written word given, but that we may know that forgiveness is as much for us who believe as for her?

What was the effect on the Jews that had the law and the prophets, but disbelieved Jesus? Very much the same as on those who, having the scripture now, hesitate to receive forgiveness at His word. "Who is this," they said, "that can forgive sins also"? They had heard of His healing the lame, feeding the hungry miraculously, performing all wonders of power and love; but now He had gone so far as to forgive sins also: who had ever heard the like of that? Was it not God's prerogative? Undoubtedly. How does the Lord answer them? He said to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace." How simple, suited, and beautiful! It is not, "Thy love hath saved thee." She did love and much; yet not this but her faith saved her. You recollect, perhaps, a natural philosopher (once a missionary) who flooded the country with a little book crying up love as the greatest, thing in the world. It is the greatest thing where there is living faith; without faith it is not divine but merely human and of the creature.

Now God accepts not what is of the creature as between Him and the guilty soul. But His saving grace has appeared to bless the soul, however guilty; and the entrance of blessing into it is and must be through faith; and love and hope follow. Hence the Lord says, "Thy faith hath saved thee." Listen not to deceivers, who are self-deceived; listen to no words of charm, no matter how sweet they sound. Friends of error maybe by your side; enemies of the truth may rise up against you. Jesus, the Son of God, is more and nearer to a needy soul than all beside. We shall all give account of ourselves to God. We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ. Those who mislead will not answer for you, nor avail you. Can you say, with that manifestation in view, that you are "always confident"? Does the Lord look you in the face and say to your spiritual ears, "Thy faith hath saved thee"? It is not in heaven He says this first, but here on earth; and what we have received from Him on earth, we will not lose in heaven. If we have not heard His voice here, do not expect to hear it there. A resurrection of judgment awaits you, if you believe not.

To the woman He said more: not only "Thy faith hath saved thee," but "go in peace." Think what a blessed word and passport it is, "go in peace" from the lips of Jesus! Whatever may come, let the trying circumstances be as they may, — adversity, poverty, sickness, or death; opposition, detraction, persecution, or aught else — whatever changes be in the course of this life, His word to every believer is, "go in peace." Look therefore to God now, rest on the name of Jesus. You are about to return to your home, and to partake of the food that is needful for the body; but is not His message of forgiveness far

more than food? Is not He infinitely more than any earthly good? You hope to enjoy a refreshing rest tonight; but what is this compared with "go in peace" from the Saviour? Think of him who fared sumptuously every day; with his purple, and fine linen, and every luxury that wealthy selfishness could command; but he died and was buried, and in hell, or Hades, "he lifted up his eyes, being in torments." May this never be your portion! The only security against it is Jesus. You require nothing good to bring. Bring your sins — yourself with all your sins on you. If you come confessing your sins, but believing on Jesus, He will blot them all out. When told to wash and be clean, do not say as Naaman, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel"? When the sinner comes to the fountain opened for all uncleanness, he is purified. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin." "This is He that came by water and blood." The grace of the Saviour can and will bless you as you are. May you not put God's assuring word from you, nor neglect so great salvation!