

[R3761 : page 120]

FORGIVEN MUCH, SHE LOVED MUCH.

– LUKE 7:36-50. – APRIL 22. –

Golden Text: – "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

THE MIRACLES at Capernaum and at Nain spread the fame of Jesus far and near in Palestine, and led a prominent Pharisee named Simon to press upon the Master an invitation for dinner. Not that Simon was a disciple and believer, but rather that as a prominent man he posed as a liberal one also, affecting that although fully content with himself and the expectations of the Pharisees he had nothing to lose nor to fear from the new and wonderful Teacher. Jesus accepted the invitation, and after the manner of the time reclined at the table with the Pharisee and the other guests. At an earlier date the Jews had been accustomed to sit upon the floor cross-legged when eating, but had changed this for the Persian custom of a sloping couch table, where the guests reclined resting upon the left arm while feeding themselves with the right hand, the feet extending back from the table portion of the couch.

Privacy in the home is still unusual in the East. Neighbors, friends, visitors, feel at liberty to come and go much as [R3761 : page 121] they please, sometimes coming in to converse with the guests while dinner is being served. Thus it was that while Jesus and others were at dinner a woman of the city, a disreputable character – possibly Mary of Magdala, but surely not Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus – came into the room with a vial of very precious ointment in her hand, walked to the back of the table couch and directly to the feet of Jesus. Her intention evidently was to anoint his feet with the ointment, but ere she had succeeded in breaking the seals and unstopping the vial her pent-up feelings found expression in a gush of tears which rained upon the Master's feet – an indignity where she had

intended honor. Quickly unfastening her hair she used it as a towel to dry the feet, and then, as expressive of her love and sympathy and adoration, while wiping the feet she kissed them repeatedly (for so the Greek text implies). Then, opening the alabaster vase, she poured upon the blessed feet the sweet, odorous ointment as originally intended.

THE PHARISEE AN EVIL SURMISER

The Pharisee said nothing, but in his heart concluded that he now had proof that Jesus was not a prophet, else he would have known intuitively that the woman was a sinner, and would have repulsed her approach even to his feet, and would have denounced her and her sinful life in no measured terms. Simon, however, was measuring the Lord by his own standard, for he appreciated not the loving sympathy of Jesus' heart, and that, although he recognized the woman as a sinner, he had compassion upon her – especially in view of the evidence she gave of shame, contrition and reformation. The incident furnishes us with a blessed illustration of our Lord's sympathy for those who come unto him accepting his mercy and love and forgiveness, however unworthy they may be of his fellowship.

One thing is noteworthy: this Pharisee seems to have entertained no thought of impurity on the part of our Lord, or that there was any acquaintance between him and the sinful woman who did him honor. Evidently the Lord's face and general demeanor, etc., were such as to preclude all thought of evil on his part. So should it be with all of the Lord's followers – their words, their manner, their looks, should all witness to that high and lofty standard of character which would place them above reproach or insinuation. It may not be possible for us to manifest so high and lofty a standard as did our Lord, because he was perfect while we are imperfect; but we should aim for his standards as nearly as possible.

Jesus answered Simon's unexpressed thought with a little parable concerning two debtors, the one owing his Master five hundred pence, the other owing fifty pence. When both parties were forgiven, which debtor would appreciate the more the creditor's generosity? which would have the more love for him? The question was addressed to Pharisee Simon, who answered that he supposed the one who had been forgiven most. This off-hand answer seems to imply that Simon did not up to this moment realize the bearing of the parable upon his own case and that of the woman – that he represented the debtor owing fifty pence, the woman, the greater sinner, owing five hundred.

A sin is a sin, a violation of the divine law, whether it be in a great matter or in a lesser matter. We are not to understand that in God's sight there is any difference as to enormities of sin, but, as here illustrated, that some are more deeply involved in it than are others – ten times as deeply. The point we are to remember, however, is that all sin is a transgression of the divine law, and that no sinner can have the divine favor of eternal life; hence, whatever our degree of sin it must be gotten rid of if we would come back into harmony with God and escape the penalty of sin and obtain the gift of God, eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. From this standpoint it was as necessary for the Pharisee to have his sins forgiven as for the woman to have hers forgiven, as neither could enter into life except as they first would be purged from sin. From God's standpoint undoubtedly Simon was in a better attitude than this sinful woman – he was nearer to God, nearer to righteousness; but since he could not attain to full righteousness and perfection in himself, but must depend upon divine mercy for the forgiveness of his sin, he was just as dependent as was the woman. As for God, it was just as easy for him to forgive the greater sins as to forgive the lesser ones, provided the required conditions were met by the sinner.

Our lesson illustrates this, and shows the attitude of those who are in condition to be approved of the Lord – to be forgiven. The parable here supposes the desire and request for forgiveness on the part of the debtors and the willingness of the Lord to cancel the debt for both. In the illustration before us we see Simon indifferent because he felt that his sin was less, the woman repentant because she felt that her sin was great. To the repentant one only could God's grace extend mercy; hence the woman was justified, her sins were forgiven, while the Pharisee, with really fewer sins, was unforgiven because he had not appealed for forgiveness nor appreciated properly his need therefor.

WITHOUT HUMILITY NO FORGIVENESS

How we see this principle illustrated all about us every day! Some of the finest, some of the noblest characters among men and women, like Simon the Pharisee, realize that they are ten-fold better than some of their neighbors who go to the Lord. They seem inclined to say within themselves, "Well, my neighbors should go and repent of their sins; surely they have need to do so. I hope that they will meet with mercy, turn over a new leaf and try to be different, as I am." These poor Pharisees know not how much they miss; they realize not that some of their more blemished neighbors and friends and acquaintances receive a forgiveness and divine blessing, while they lack these things because not sufficiently humble in heart to make the request – to come unto the Father for forgiveness through the only name given under heaven and amongst men whereby we must be saved.

We are not threatening such with eternal torment or any other dire punishment: we are merely pointing out their loss – that they fail to receive the fellowship, the forgiveness with God, the blessings and privileges which might be theirs, and from the

standpoint of which they might attain to still greater favors and mercies under the high calling of this age. Surely, therefore, the loss suffered at present is great, regardless of any future retribution.

Here we see the reason why the Scriptures declare that **[R3762 : page 122]** not many great, not many wise, not many learned, not many noble or rich according to the course of this world, will be amongst the Lord's chosen ones and heirs of the Kingdom. Why? Because these more favored ones, according to natural conditions, appreciate less the necessity of divine sympathy and assistance and forgiveness and help. Hence we find still that the Gospel of mercy and forgiveness appeals most directly to the sinner class, and this class it is continually lifting up out of the mire of sin and death, transforming them by the renewing of their minds, changing them from glory to glory, until some of them by the grace of God shall be heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ their Lord in the Kingdom and its glory, honor and immortality. It is not that our Lord Jesus loves less those who are more moral, more upright, more nearly by nature up to the standard of perfection. Nay! other things being equal, he certainly would love these the more.

For instance, note the Master's love for the young man who was very rich and who inquired what he should do to inherit the Kingdom. When the Lord pointed to the Law and the young man was able to say, "All these have I kept from my youth up," Jesus beholding him loved him – loved him, we may be sure, far more than he would have loved him had he been a reprobate character, a prodigal. But when it comes to the point that the moralist or man of noble character spurns divine favor and ignores his own blemishes, and when, on the other hand, the poor, the degraded, the prodigal, realizing their sins, cry out to the Lord for mercy and forgiveness, we can understand why the broken and the contrite heart is more acceptable to God and justified rather than

the other. Let us, dear brethren, while rejoicing in every element of natural advantage and likeness to our Creator that may be ours, remember to be very humble, remember that we have nothing perfect, and hence that we could not commend ourselves to God; and that, in order to receive his blessing and favor, we must confess to him our sins and have his forgiveness, and that in the only channel and name in which he has provided it – Christ.

VIEWED FROM TWO STANDPOINTS

Simon had been congratulating himself that he was honoring the Master by having him to dinner because of his own honorable station in society, and that this poor woman was dishonoring him because of her inferior station and evil reputation. Our Lord reverses the picture before his mind by calling his attention to the fact that he had really neglected the usual hospitalities of the country as respects an honored guest, while the woman had made up for his lack. It was the custom of the country for a host to receive his guest with distinguished attention, to embrace him, to kiss him on the cheek when he entered, to have his head anointed with perfumed ointment and to have a servant wash his feet. Simon, as a wealthy and prominent man, knew all this, and would doubtless have followed the ordinary custom had his guest been one in high social standing; but his invitation had been of a patronizing sort. He felt that he was doing the Master an honor to bring him into his house, and that for the sake of others he would not wish that this honor should seem too pronounced, because the followers of Jesus especially were ignorant, unlearned men and not used to the best customs of society. His own servants would occupy a higher social plane really than the disciples of Jesus, and hence he felt that he must restrain his manifestations of hospitality lest Jesus and his humble band and the public should get the

impression that he really recognized Jesus, a Teacher, as his equal or his superior.

Our Lord in no unkind terms called Simon's attention to the fact that he neither gave him an anointing, nor kissed him, nor provided the washing for his feet, but that this poor woman had washed his feet with her tears, had kissed them, and had anointed them with a very precious ointment. The Master associated these facts of the moment with his parable, and declared that this was an indication of greater love which the woman bore and of her greater appreciation of his message of forgiveness and mercy. Her course intimated that she had accepted the Lord's declaration, and so now he probably formally declared to her that her sins were forgiven. To the Pharisee he explained that he, having less to be forgiven, had been less appreciative of the privilege of forgiveness, so the penitent sinner got the blessing and the much more nearly righteous Pharisee (holiness professor) failed to receive it.

"THY SINS BE FORGIVEN THEE"

What words could have been more sweet or more precious to the poor woman's ears! Surely she appreciated that declaration more than anything else our Lord could have said unto her. And so it is with all who approach the Lord as their Savior from the right standpoint. We do indeed rejoice subsequently to hear our Lord's message respecting the glory, honor and immortality which we may attain through his assistance, but the first message to every one of us must be, "Thy sins are forgiven thee" – otherwise we could have no peace, no joy, no hope of a glorious future. In other words, every other hope, every other blessing, is based upon this one – the forgiveness of our sins.

Let us make sure not only that we have thus come to the Lord recognizing our sins, manifesting our repentance for them, but let us be sure also that we have accepted the divine grace in

and through the blood of Christ, and that we are trusting not in any righteousness of our own, but that we wholly lean upon the favors secured to us through him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood. Upon the strength of this faith we may bring our tears and our alabaster boxes of perfume of daily endeavor to serve and to please him who has done so much for us, but without our recognition of our sins and of his forgiveness we could bring nothing acceptable to him. In this connection also let us remember the Master's words to the woman in conclusion, "Go in peace,"

"THY FAITH HATH MADE THEE WHOLE"

Ah, none but the forgiven ones know the peace of God that passeth all understanding which comes into the hearts of those who hear the Master's assurance that their sins are all forgiven, covered by the robe of his righteousness. They and they alone can go in peace, and their peace will be in proportion to their faith, and their faith in proportion to their knowledge. It is to this end that the Lord gives us a full, clear and explicit explanation of what constitutes sin, **[R3762 : page 123]** what is the remedy for it, how that remedy has been provided, and how it is applied to us in proportion to our exercise of faith, and that our faith is manifested by our devotion.

Let us bear in mind that it was not the woman's works that saved her and brought her the Lord's favor, nor the ointment, nor the tears nor the kiss – it was the faith: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Heb. 11:6.) According to our faith it shall be unto us. But let us not forget either that faith must work; that if it does not work it is a sure sign that it is dead. So surely as we have the true faith in the Lord, so surely good and honest hearts will bring forth worship, praise, honor to our Master and Redeemer. These conditions of our hearts will surely manifest themselves as did the woman's by tears, by services to the feet

of the Master, by an anointing of the most precious perfume that we can bring.

"HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF HIM"

The Prophet, speaking evidently of the living members of the body of Christ at the close of this dispensation, declares, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" There is a beauty, a grace, peculiar to our Lord, the Head; and each member of his body has some peculiar grace or quality of character-likeness to him. And so, when in the end of this age the last members of the Lord's body, the Church, announce in its due season the parousia of the Lord and that his Kingdom is at hand to be established, there is a beauty attaching to that in connection with this service, this message, in the sight of each other, in the sight of all who are of the household of faith, but not in the sight of the world, for, as the Apostle declares, "The world knoweth us not even as it knew him not." – 1 John 3:1.

It is not our privilege or opportunity to anoint the Head of the body, the Lord Jesus. Simon and others of that time had that great privilege, however they used it. With us, however, the privilege still remains of anointing the feet members of the body of Christ, and day by day we are tested along this very line. To what extent do we love much the Lord and his members? Is it not in proportion to our appreciation of the divine love for us and for all mankind? If we love little we will honor little, if we love much we will honor much.

Let us, then, avail ourselves of the privileges day by day of anointing the feet members of the body, realizing that whatsoever is done unto one of the least of these his brethren is done unto the Lord himself, and is a perfume of sweet odor to

him. Let us be more gentle, more tender, more careful in our honoring and dealing with the feet members. Let us remember that they have trials and difficulties enough in their conflict with the tiresome journey of life, and that there must be no neglect of them on our part, for the opportunity of thus manifesting our love and devotion to the Lord is too great a privilege to be overlooked or slighted. Nor need we wait for opportunities to do great things: kind words and looks, a little assistance, may be the tears or the perfume as circumstances may permit.
