

AND SHE WAS A SINNER

– LUKE 7:36-50. – JUNE 23. –

"Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." – 1 Timothy 1:15.

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST is the Message of Divine compassion toward sinners. All religions recognize sin and propose reconciliation with God – by works of charity, by voluntary self-torture, or by future torments. None of the heathen gods have any touch of sympathy for humanity; they are cold, cruel, vindictive. The Bible, of all the religious books we know of, alone tells of a God touched with the feeling of human infirmities and with sympathy toward sinners. "God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly." – Rom. 5:8.

Note the expressions of the Scriptures indicating Divine compassion: "God looked down from His Holy Habitation to behold and to hear the groaning of the prisoners" – the suffering of humanity under the death penalty, and the incidental aches and pains of our fallen condition. He did more than look, He did more than pity; His right Arm of divine power in due time began to bring deliverance for the captives of sin and death. Already He has sent His Son and thus provided a Ransom price for the sins of the whole world. Already His Son has been glorified, and merely awaits the time for the establishment of His Kingdom.

Meantime Divine grace has been still further manifested in the invitation granted to a "little flock," to be justified by faith and to be sanctified by the High Priest's offering of them, and thus to become New Creatures, joint-heirs in His Kingdom. Still the Scriptures tell us of God's pursuing Love and Mercy. He is unwilling that any should perish, but wills, on the contrary, that all shall have an opportunity to turn to Him that they may have everlasting life. It is for this very

purpose that Messiah's Kingdom will be established in great glory and with full power. God's right Arm is not shortened. In due time it will bring the salvation for which the poor groaning creation has so long waited. It will come with the manifestation of the Sons of God in Kingdom power. – Rom. 8:19.

Eventually the Redeemer "shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." Eventually the Heavenly Father's Plan will be so outworked that every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth shall be heard saying, "Praise and glory and honor, dominion and might be unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb, forever." Eventually God, through the Messianic Kingdom, "shall wipe away all tears from off all faces," and cause the reproach of being His people to disappear from the earth. (Rev. 21:4; Isa. 25:8.) So superior is this God of the Bible and of Christianity to all the misconceptions of heathendom and Christendom that, when the glorious Day of Messiah's Kingdom shall have been fully ushered in, the glory of our God will be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. – Isa. 40:5.

A WOMAN WHO WAS A SINNER

Our Redeemer possessed and exemplified the Heavenly Father's love and mercy. He declared that He was merely the exponent of the Father's will, and hence of the Father's love and sympathy. Our Lord's sympathy is presented not only in this lesson but also in many others, and all of His followers do well to cultivate the same spirit. Jesus was not sympathetic with the sins of the people, but with the people themselves. He realized as few do the real difficulty with the majority of sinners. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, in sin did my mother conceive me!" exclaimed the Prophet. We are sinners by heredity. We have inherited partially depraved minds, partially unbalanced brains and morals.

St. Paul, speaking of the very noblest class, declares, "We cannot do the things which we would" – any of us; hence all humanity are sinners. "There is none righteous, no, not one." Therefore it is merely

a question of the degree of sinfulness, and the degree is often measured by the degree of inherited weakness, or the degree of surrounding temptations. The really reprehensible and blameworthy sinners are those who sin wilfully, deliberately, knowingly, intentionally, without either will or effort to resist sin. But it is not ours to judge which these are. Indeed, we are incompetent to judge, we cannot read the heart, we cannot fully appreciate the degree of the temptation and the weakness of the tempted. Hence the Master said, "Judge nothing before the time." In due time the saints will judge the world, but not now.

Now we must follow the Master's example; and we may well do this because, although He knew what was in man, as we could not know, He was very charitable, which leads us to suppose that if we were perfect we would be all the more charitable towards sinners, though not at all sympathetic with sin.

Who can read the New Testament Gospel narratives **[R5032 : page 168]** without realizing that Jesus was indeed a "Friend of sinners," as was charged against Him by the Pharisees? And is not this the feature of the Bible which specially commends it to humanity? With the exception of the wilful sinners, whom we must hope are few, there comes a time when sin is seen in its true color and is detested. Then is the time when the gospel Message from the Friend of sinners specially appeals to such. All seem to know instinctively that Jesus stands ready to be the Friend and Helper of all who come to the Father through Him.

Jesus had accepted an invitation to dine at a Pharisee's house. The dinner had begun. Resting upon one arm they used the other for handling the food. After the custom of the times, they reclined upon low tables or couches, their heads toward the center where the food was placed. A curtain separated the dining room from the outer court.

While the dinner was progressing, a woman "who was a sinner," a harlot, deeply penitent, entered. She had in her hand some precious perfume, with which she intended to anoint the Savior's feet, as was sometimes done with dignitaries of that time. Her heart was full, and

tears gushed from her eyes while she sought to open the bottle; they fell like rain upon Jesus' feet, evidently quite contrary to the woman's intention. She was dishonoring the very feet she intended to honor. Loosening her hair, she used it as a towel, entirely regardless of the fact that for a woman at that time it was considered dishonorable to let down her hair in public; but intent upon her errand she dried the feet and poured the precious perfume upon them, presumably as an honor to the One from whom she had heard "wonderful words of life" – words of Divine compassion and pity for sinners, words of hope for herself.

TWO DEBTORS AND THEIR LOVE

The host of the occasion watched Jesus to see how He would receive this manifestation of loving devotion, saying in his heart, If this Man were a prophet, He would know that the woman offering Him this honor is disreputable. He would denounce her and bid her, "Begone," and not to touch Him. Jesus knew his thoughts and answered him in parabolic form, saying, "A certain creditor had two debtors, one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. Neither could pay and he forgave them both. Which of them will love him most?" The Pharisee replied, "I suppose he to whom most was forgiven." Jesus agreed with him.

Then Jesus made application of the matter; turning to the woman, He said to His host, Seest thou this woman, who washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair? You are the host of the occasion, yet you did not offer Me water for the washing of My feet, as is customary in our land to do to those whom we desire to honor. You gave Me no kiss, as is customary amongst friends, but this woman has repeatedly kissed My feet. "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she hath anointed My feet with ointment. Therefore, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." And He said to the woman, "Thy sins are forgiven."

Is not this to some extent an illustration and an explanation of the fact that the majority of those who love the Lord most are such as realize their own sinful and fallen condition most and who appreciate most the forgiving love of God manifested in Jesus? Is it not true today also that those who are most moral, and therefore might be said to have less to be forgiven, have correspondingly less love?

This should not be the case, however. The less degraded ought naturally to be the more able to love and to appreciate Divine goodness and love and the more willing to present their little *all* in Divine service. **[R5033 : page 168]**

Those present not improperly began to inquire, Who is this that even forgives sins? The only satisfactory answer is that He is the one He professes to be, the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world. He was then in process of rendering up His sacrifice according to His covenant, and on the strength of that covenant and sacrifice He had authority to tell the woman that her sins were forgiven, because He was making the Atonement which would be applicable to her.

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