

A Woman Which Was a Sinner

by C.H. Spurgeon

The sermon highlights the glory and power of God's grace in transforming the heart of a sinner and creating a new creature.

Scripture: Luke 7:36

Topics: "Grace", "Love", "Repentance"

Description

C.H. Spurgeon emphasizes the distinction between the woman who was a sinner and Mary Magdalene, clarifying that the former's act of anointing Jesus was a profound expression of love and gratitude for forgiveness. He highlights the grace that transforms a sinner into a devoted follower of Christ, illustrating how her humble actions, driven by deep repentance, serve as a model for true devotion. Spurgeon contrasts her with Mary of Bethany, noting that while both women loved Jesus, their circumstances and expressions of love were different, showcasing the multifaceted nature of grace. The sermon calls believers to recognize the depth of their own sin and the corresponding depth of God's grace, encouraging them to respond with fervent love and service to Christ. Ultimately, Spurgeon urges the congregation to act on their faith and love for Jesus, regardless of their past, as a testament to the transformative power of grace.

Transcript

This is the woman who has been confounded with Mary Magdalene. How the error originated it would not be easy to imagine, but error it certainly is. There is not the slightest shadow of evidence that this woman, who was a sinner, had even the remotest connection with her out of whom Jesus cast seven devils. In delivering you a sermon a few Sabbaths ago, upon the life of Mary of Magdala, I think I showed you that it was hardly possible, and most improbable, that she could have been a sinner in the sense here intended, and now I venture to affirm that there is as much evidence to prove that the woman, in the narrative now before us, was the Queen of Sheba, or the mother of Sisera, as that she was Mary Magdalene: there is not a figment or fraction of evidence to be found. The fact is, there is no connection between the two.

Further, the sinner before us is not Mary of Bethany, with whom so many have confounded her. Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, did anoint our Saviour, but this is a previous anointing, by quite a different person, and the two narratives are altogether distinct. There is a great likeness, certainly, between the two. The principal persons were both women, full of ardent love to Christ; they both anointed the Lord with ointment; the name of Simon is connected with both, and they both wiped the Saviour's feet with their hair.

But it ought not to astonish you that there were two persons whose intense affection thus displayed itself; the astonishment should rather be that there were not two hundred who did so, for the anointing of the feet of an honoured friend was by no means so uncommon a token of respect among the Orientals as to be an unprecedented marvel. Loved as Jesus deserved to be, the marvel is that he was not oftener visited with these generous tokens of human love. It is a pity to fuse two occasions into one, as though we grudged a double unction to the Anointed of the Lord.

That both events should happen in the houses of persons named Simon is not at all remarkable: be it remembered that the one was Simon the Pharisee, and the other Simon the leper; and that Simon is one of the commonest of Jewish names; and that in our days, a thing having happened in the house of a John, and another thing like it in the house of another John, would not be remarkable, since Johns are exceedingly common amongst us, as were Simons in the days of our Lord. But that the two, or perhaps I should say three, anointings (for I am inclined to think there were three) are not the same is evident from the following reasons: they differ in time; our Lord lived at least six months after his anointing by this woman, and if you follow the narrative, you read in the very next chapter, "And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him."

But when Mary anointed him at Bethany, he said, "She did it for my burial;" and our Lord was then within a very few days of his crucifixion. The anointing by Mary, the sister of Lazarus, took place at Bethany (Matthew 26:6), but this occurred in Galilee, which is quite another quarter. Moreover, the fact itself was really a very different one, for although both women anoint Christ with ointment, yet there was a peculiar preciousness and power of perfume about the spikenard of the wealthier Mary, which is not mentioned in the ointment of this woman of a lower position in life.

Mary, according to John (John 12:3), poured out a whole pound of the costly nard, but such is not said of the humble offering of the woman that was a sinner. Matthew tells us that a woman poured the ointment on his head, but this poor penitent is only said to have anointed his feet: tears are not mentioned in connection with Mary by either Matthew, Mark, or John, while they make a conspicuous feature in the love of the gracious mourner now before us. After the transaction there was an objection raised in both cases, but mark the great difference!

In this case, Simon the Pharisee objected because she, being a sinner, was allowed to have such familiarity with the Lord; in the other case, no such objection was raised to the person, but Judas Iscariot objected to her having been so profuse and extravagant in the abundance and costliness of the anointing, and murmured, saying that this ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor. If you confound these two occurrences, you not only make an egregious mistake, but you lose a precious lesson.

This case now before us is the offering of a poor returning wanderer, who, under a deep sense of gratitude, brings the best she has to her Lord, and is accepted by his grace. In the case of Mary of Bethany, it was an advanced saint, one who had sat at Jesus' feet and heard of him, and had aforesaid chosen the good part which should not be taken away from her, and she brings a costly tribute as the offering of her deep, sincere affection, which had grown and deepened by the receipt of many favours from his loving hand.

The advanced believer is more bold than the new convert. She anoints his head when the other only anoints his feet, and she is not less loving, for if there be fewer tears there is a more costly spikenard. Jesus defended the penitent, and bade her go in peace; but in Mary's case there was no need to say, "Thy sins are forgiven," for she already possessed that priceless boon; our Lord, instead of merely defending, warmly eulogised her love, and declared, "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

Thus much will suffice to show you that "the woman which was a sinner" is neither to be confounded with Mary of Magdala on the one hand, or Mary of Bethany on the other. Let us learn to read our Bibles with our eyes open, to study them as men do the works of great artists, studying each figure, and even each sweet variety of light and shade.

Too long have we been controverting on the threshold of the text, let us now lift the latch. Lo, on the table I see two savoury dishes, let us feed thereon. Here are two silver bells, let us ring them; their first note is Grace, and the second tone is Love.

GRACE, the most costly of spikenard: this story literally drips with it, like those Oriental trees which bleed perfume; or as the spouse when she rose up to open to her beloved, and her hands dropped with myrrh, and her fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh upon the handles of the lock. Grace, that gentle dew of heaven, is here plenteously distilled, and falls like small rain upon the tender herb. Grace, sovereign, distinguishing, omnipotent, is exceedingly magnified in this narrative; lo, I see it exalted upon a glorious high throne, with the king's daughter waiting as an honourable woman among its courtiers.

First, grace is here glorified in its object. She was "a sinner"--a sinner not in the flippant, unmeaning, every-day sense of the term, but a sinner in the blacker, filthier, and more obnoxious sense. She had forsaken the guide of her youth, and forgotten the covenant of her God; she had sinned against the laws of purity, and had made herself as a defiled thing; she had fallen into that deep ditch concerning which it is written, "The abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein."

According to our Lord's parable, she was in comparison with the Pharisee as a five-hundred-pence sinner, while the Pharisee was but as fifty. She was one of the scarlet sinners that we read of in Scripture--she sinned and made others to sin. Hers were offenses which provoke the Lord to jealousy, and stir up his wrath. Yet, oh, miracle of miracles, she was an object of distinguishing grace, ordained unto eternal life! Why was this? On what legal grounds was she selected? For what merit was she chosen?

Was this an extraordinary and out-of-the-way instance? By no means, dear friends, for the grace of God has frequently chosen the lowest of the low, and the vilest of the vile. Recollect how, in the pedigree of our Lord, you find the name of the shameless Tamar, the harlot Rahab, and the unfaithful Bathsheba, as if to indicate that the Saviour of sinners would enter into near relationship with the most degraded and fallen of our race. This is, in fact, one of the dearest titles of our Lord, though it was hissed at him from the lips of contempt, "A friend of publicans and sinners."

This is Jesus' character of which he is not ashamed: "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." Free grace has made no distinction among men on account of merit, whether false or real, if real there be. The law has concluded us all in unbelief, and then the abounding grace of God looking upon us all as equally cast away and ruined both by Adam's fall and by our own personal transgression, has predestinated and called whomsoever it would. Do you not hear from the throne of mercy the echoes of that sovereign proclamation, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; I will have compassion on

whom I will have compassion"?

Grace has pitched upon the most unlikely cases in order to show itself to be grace; it has found a dwelling-place for itself in the most unworthy heart, that its freeness might be the better seen. Do I address one who has greatly fallen? Let this thought comfort thee, if thy heart bewails thy sin--let this give thee hope of mercy, that in the election of grace some of the grossest blasphemers, persecutors, thieves, fornicators, and drunkards, have been included, and in consequence thereof they have been forgiven, renewed, and made to live sober, righteous, and godly lives.

Such as these have obtained mercy that in them first God might show forth all longsuffering as a comfort and encouragement to others to cry unto the Lord for mercy. Grace reigns right majestically in the case before us, in that this particular sinner should be chosen; to choose a sinner was something, but to choose this one individual was even more astonishing. No doubt, she did in spirit ask herself, "Why me, Lord? why me?" Had she been here this morning, she would sing as heartily as any of us--

"Oh, gift of gifts! Oh, grace of faith!

My God, how can it be

That thou, who has discerning love,

Shouldst give that gift to me!

How many hearts thou mightst have had

More innocent than mine!

How many souls more worthy far

Of that pure touch of thine!

Ah, Grace! into unlikeliest hearts

It is thy boast to come;

The glory of thy light to find

In darkest spots a home."

At yonder table sits Simon the Pharisee, a good respectable body as he thinks himself to be, and yet no choice divine has fallen upon him--while this poor harlot is elected by distinguishing grace! How can we account for this? Many there were in the city like to herself, some worse, some better; but grace had marked her as its own. Oh, strange, yet admirable sovereignty! Now, it is possible that you may not be much taken with the glory of grace in selecting her, but I will ask you whether you are not delighted with the grace which separated you to be the Lord's? O brethren, when once a man discovers that God has chosen him, when he feels that grace has broken his heart, has brought him to Christ, and has covered him with a perfect righteousness, then he breaks out in wondering exclamations, "How couldst thou have chosen me? What am I, and what is my father's house, that I should be taken into such royal favour?" The more a believer looks within, the more he discovers reasons for divine wrath, and the less he believes in his own personal merit. How is the heart of a true believer filled with adoring gratitude that ever the Lord's

boundless love should have been pleased to settle and fix itself upon him! This is not so much for me to descant upon as it is for your private meditations. I earnestly commend to you that precious thought, that Jehovah loved you from before the foundations of the world, and chose you when he might have left you, chose you when he passed over thousands of the great and the noble, the wise, and the learned. The doctrine is not a dogma to be fought over, as dogs over a bone, but to be rejoiced in, and turned to practical account as an incentive to reverent wonder and affectionate gratitude. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound, and the "woman which was a sinner," is now before us a weeping penitent; the sinner "of the city," a public sinner, is now openly a follower of the holy One.

Grace is greatly magnified in its fruits. Who would have thought that a woman who had yielded her members to be servants of unrighteousness, to her shame and confusion, should have now become, what if I call her a maid of honour to the King of kings?--one of Christ's most favoured servitors? Who offered hospitalities to Jesus which the Pharisee omitted, and offered them in an infinitely better spirit and style than the Pharisee could have done it even had he tried! Let us remark, that the grace of God brought this woman in a way of providence to listen to the Saviour's discourses.

In a former part of this chapter it appears he had been preaching the gospel, and more especially preaching it to the poor. Perhaps she stood in the street attracted by the crowd, and, as she listened to our Saviour's talk, it seemed to hold her fast. She had never heard a man speak after that fashion, and when he spoke of abounding mercy, and the willingness of God to accept as many as would come to him, then the tears began to follow each other down her cheek; and when she listened again to that meek and lowly preacher, and heard him tell of the Father in heaven who would receive prodigals and press them to his loving bosom, then her heart was fairly broken, she relinquished her evil traffic, she became a new woman, desirous of better things, anxious to be freed from sin.

But she was greatly agitated in her heart with the question, could she, would she, be really forgiven? Would such pardoning love as she had heard of reach even to her? She hoped so, and was in a measure comforted. Her faith grew, and with it an ardent love. The Spirit of God still wrought with her till she enjoyed a feeble hope, a gleam of confidence; she believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, that he had appeared on earth to forgive sins, and she rested on him for the forgiveness of her sins, and longed for an opportunity to do him homage, and if possible to win a word direct from his mouth.

The Lord of mercy came to the city where she lived. "Now," she thought, "here is my opportunity; that blessed prophet has come; the man who spake as never man spake is near me, and I have already derived such benefit from him that I love him better than all besides; I love him as my own soul. I will steal into the house of the Pharisee, that I may feast my eyes with the sight of him." Now, when she came to the door, the Saviour was reclining at his meat, according to the Oriental custom, and his feet were towards the door; for the Pharisee had but little respect for Christ, and had not given him the best and innermost place at the feast; but there he lay with his uncovered feet towards the door, and the woman, almost unperceived, came close to him, and, as she looked and saw that the Pharisee had refused him the ordinary courtesy of washing his feet, and that they were all stained and travel-worn with his long journeys of love, she began to weep, and the tears fell in such plenteous showers that they even washed his feet.

Here was holy water of a true sort. The crystal of penitence falling in drops, each one as precious as a diamond. Never were feet bedewed with a more precious water than those penitent eyes showered forth. Then, unbinding those luxurious tresses, which had been for her the devil's nets in which to entangle souls, she wiped the sacred feet therewith. Surely she thought that her chief adornment, the crown and

glory of her womanhood, was all too worthless a thing to do service to the lowest and meanest part of the Son of God.

That which once was her vanity now was humbled and yet exalted to the lowest office; she made her eyes a ewer and her locks a towel. "Never," says bishop Hall, "was any hair so preferred as this; how I envy those locks that were graced with the touch of those sacred feet." There a sweet temptation overtook her, "I will even kiss those feet, I will humbly pay reverence to those blessed limbs." She spake not a word, but how eloquent were her actions! better even than psalms and hymns were these acts of devotion.

Then she bethought her of that alabaster box containing perfumed oil with which, like most Eastern women, she was wont to anoint herself for the pleasure of the smell and for the increase of her beauty, and now, opening it, she pours out the costliest thing she has upon his blessed feet. Not a word, I say, came from her; and, brethren, we would prefer a single speechless lover of Jesus, who acted as she did, to ten thousand noisy talkers who have no gifts, no heart, no tears.

As for the Master, he remained quietly acquiescent, saying nothing, but all the while drinking in her love, and letting his poor weary heart find sweet solace in the gratitude of one who once was a sinner, but who was to be such no more.

Grace, my brethren, deserves our praise, since it does so much for its object. Grace does not choose a man and leave him as he is. My brethren and sisters, men rail at grace sometimes as though it were opposed to morality, whereas it is the great source and cause of all complete morality--indeed, there is no real holiness in the sight of God except that which grace creates, and which grace sustains. This woman, apart from grace, had remained black and defiled still to her dying day, but the grace of God wrought a wondrous transformation, removing the impudence of her face, the flattery from her lips, the finery from her dress, and the lust from her heart. Eyes which were full of adultery, were now fountains of repentance; lips which were doors of lascivious speech, now yield holy kisses--the profligate was a penitent, the castaway a new creature. All the actions which are attributed to this woman illustrate the transforming power of divine grace. She exhibited the deepest repentance. She wept abundantly. She wept out of no mere sentimentalism, but at the remembrance of her many crimes. She wept for sorrow and for shame as she thought over her early childhood, and how she had slighted a mother's training, how she had listened to the tempter's voice, and hurried on from bad to worse. Every part of her life-story would rise before her as a painfully vivid dream. The sight of those blessed feet helped her to remember the dangerous paths into which she had wandered; the sluices of grief were drawn up, and her soul flowed out in tears. O blessed Spirit of grace, we adore thee as we see the rock smitten and the waters gushing. "He causeth his wind to blow and the waters flow."

Note the woman's humility. She had once possessed a brazen face, and knew no bashfulness, but now she stands behind the Saviour. She did not push herself in before his face; she was content to have the meanest standing-place. If she might not venture to anoint his head, yet, if she might do service to his feet, she blushed as she accepted the honour. Those who serve the Lord Jesus truly, have a holy bashfulness, a shrinking sense of their own unworthiness, and are content to fulfil the very lowest office in his household. That is no service for Christ when thou wouldst need ride the king's horse, and wear the king's garment, and have it said, "This is the man whom the king delighteth to honour." That is serving thyself rather than Christ, when thou covetest the chief place in the synagogue, and wouldst have men call thee Rabbi. But that is real service when thou canst care for the poor; when thou canst condescend to men of low estate, and become a teacher of the ignorant and an instructor of babes. He serves well who works

behind his master's back, unknown and unperceived--toiling in the dark, unreported, unapplauded, and happy to have it so. See, beloved, how in a woman who was once so shameless, grace plants and makes to flourish the fair and modest flower of true humility.

Yet was the woman courageous, for she must have needed much courage to enter into a Pharisee's house. The look of a Pharisee to this woman must have been enough to freeze summer into howling winter. Those Pharisees had an insufferable contempt of everybody who was not of their own clique, who did not fast twice a week, and tithe their mint, anise, and cummin; they said, by every gesture, "Stand by, I am holier than thou." To a person of infamous character, the pompous Pharisee would be doubly contemptuous, and a woman conscious of unworthiness would be sorely wounded by his manners; besides, at a feast, her tears would be much out of place, and therefore she would be the more rudely rebuked; but how fearless she was, and how bravely she held her tongue when Simon railed! What will not men and women do when grace moves them to love, and love prompts them to courage! Ay, into the very jaws of hell the grace of God would make a believer dare to enter, if God commanded him. There is no mountain too high for a believing foot to scale, and no furnace too hot for a believing heart to bear. Let Rome and its amphitheatres, Piedmont and its snow, France and its galleys, Smithfield and its stakes, the Netherlands and their rivers of blood, all speak of what grace can do when once it reigns in the heart, what heroes it can make of the very weakest and most timid of God's children, where it rules supreme.

I have said that in every part of this woman's action grace is honoured, and it is so more especially in this respect, that what she did was practical. Hers was not pretence, but real and expensive service. The religion of some professors stops short at their substance; it costs them nothing, and, I fear, is worth nothing. They appear before the Lord empty. They buy no sweet cane with money, neither does the Lord receive the fat of their sacrifices. I must confess myself utterly at a loss to understand the piety of some people. I thank God I am not bound to understand it, and that I am not sent into the world to be a judge of my fellow creatures, but I do greatly wonder at the religion of many. There are to be found, and I have found them, persons whose love to Christ is of such a sort that they give to his cause the larger proportion of their substance, and do so gladly, thinking it a privilege; yea, I know some who pinch themselves--some of the poor and needy, who stint themselves that they may give to Christ. Such are doubtless blessed in the deed. I do not understand those men who have thousands upon thousands of pounds, perhaps hundreds of thousands, and profess to love Christ, and dole out their gifts to Jesus in miserable fragments. I must leave them to their Master, to be judged at the last, but I confess I do not understand them or admire them. If I did love Christ at all, I would love him so that I would give him all I could, and if I did not do that, I think I would say, "He is not worth it, and I will not be a sham professor. It is rank hypocrisy to profess love and then to act a miserly part. Let those who are guilty of it settle the account between God and their own souls. This woman's alabaster box was given freely, and if she had had more to give, she would have given it, after the spirit of that other woman, that memorable widow, who had two mites, which made a farthing, which were all her living, but she gave it all out of love to God. Grace reigns indeed with high control when it leads men who naturally would be selfish to practice liberality in the cause of the Redeemer. Let these gleanings suffice, the vintage of the fruits of grace is too great for us to gather it all this morning.

I would have you remark, in the third place, that grace is seen by attentive eyes in our Lord's acceptance of what this chosen vessel had to bring. Jesus knew her sin. The Pharisee wondered that Jesus did not shrink from contact with her. You and I may wonder too. We sometimes feel it a task to have to commune with persons of a certain character even when they profess to repent: our Lord's sensitiveness of the guilt

of sin was much keener than ours, yet he rested still upon the couch, and quietly accepted what she brought, permitted her the fond familiarity of kissing his feet again and again, and to bedew them with her tears--permitted all that, I say, and accepted all that, and herein made his grace to shine most brightly. Oh, that Jesus should ever accept anything of me, that he should be willing to accept my tears, willing to receive my prayers and my praises! We cheerfully accept a little flower from a child, but then the flower is beautiful, and we are not far above the child; but Jesus accepts from us that which is in its nature impure, and upbraids us not. O grace, how condescending thou art; see, believer, Jesus has heard thy prayers and answered them; he has blessed thy labours, given thee souls as thy reward, and at this moment that which is in thy heart to do for him he receives, and he raises no objection, but takes what thou bringest to him, takes it with joy. O grace, thou art grace indeed, when the offerings of unworthy ones become dear unto Jesus' heart.

Further, grace is displayed in this narrative when you see our Lord Jesus Christ become the defender of the penitent. Everywhere grace is the object of human cavil: men snap at it like evening wolves. Some attack it at the fountain head; they cannot endure the doctrine of election. Some professors almost foam at the mouth at the very mention of the word "predestination;" they cannot bear it, and yet it is God's truth, let them say what they will, and there shall it stand, let them kick against the pricks if they dare.

"It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Would to God men would give up their rebellious questionings and bow before the King of kings. On this occasion, Simon cavilled at grace in that a sinful woman should be allowed to approach the Lord, he would have put her in quarantine at the least, if not in prison. Some object to grace in its perpetuity, they struggle against persevering grace; but others, like this Simon, struggle against the bounty of grace.

How could such a woman as she was be permitted to draw so near to Christ? Certain captious spirits will demand, "How should Jesus give to such unworthy ones such acceptance, such manifestations of himself, such privileges?" Our Lord took upon himself to defend her, and therefore she might well afford to hold her tongue. So shall it be with you. If Satan accuse you, and your enemies with loud-mouthed accusations cry out against you, you have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who will certainly plead your cause and clear you.

Jesus by his defensive parable shows that he was justified in letting the woman approach, because great love prompted her. There was no sin in her approach, but much to commend, since her motive was excellent, and the motive is the true measure of a deed. She felt intense love and gratitude towards the person who had forgiven her; therefore, her acts were not to be forbidden, but commended. He justifies her and incidentally justifies himself. Had he not done well in having won a sinner's heart to penitence and love?

Was not election justified in having chosen one to such holy devotedness and fervency? At the last great day, the Lord will justify his grace before the eyes of the whole universe, for he will allow the grace-wrought virtues of his chosen ones to be unveiled, and all eyes shall see that grace reigns through righteousness. Then shall they for ever be silenced who accused the grace of God of leading to licentiousness, for they shall see that in every case free forgiveness led to gratitude, and gratitude to holiness.

The chosen shall be made choice men. Grace chose them notwithstanding all their deformities; but when it has cast about them a supernal beauty, they shall be the wonder and admiration of the universe,

evidently made to be the noblest and best of mankind. Show me where grace ever created sin! You cannot, but lo, in what a manner has grace created holiness! It is not ashamed to let its chosen sheep appear before the great dividing Shepherd's throne, for of them all it shall be said, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink." Grace does not smuggle men into heaven, but brings them up to heaven's requirements through the Spirit and the blood.

Once more, my brethren, the grace of God is seen in this narrative in the bestowal of yet richer favours. Great grace saved her, rich grace encouraged her, unbounded grace gave her a divine assurance of forgiveness. It was proved that she was forgiven, for she loved much, but she had never received the full assurance of it. She was a hopeful penitent rather than a confirmed believer. But the Master said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee;" from that moment full assurance of faith must have occupied her soul. And then he gave her that choice dismissary benediction, "Go in peace," by which the peace of God which passeth all understanding henceforth kept her mind, so that even when she had to go out of this world into the unknown realm, she heard in the midst of Jordan's billows, the divine sentence, "Go in peace." Ah! beloved, you know not what grace can do for you. God is not stinted in his grace. If he has lifted you up out of the miry clay he can do more, he can set your feet upon a rock. If on the rock you already stand, he can do more, he can put a new song into your mouth; and if already you lift the joyous hymn, he can do more yet, he can establish your goings. You do not know the exceeding bounty of your own heavenly Father yet. Unfathomable is his goodness. Arise and enjoy it. Behold the whole land is before you, from Dan unto Beersheba--all the provisions of the covenant of grace belong to you. Have but faith, and you shall yet comprehend with all saints what are the heights and depths, and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

Here, then, was grace in its object, grace in its fruit, grace in the acceptance of that fruit, grace in the defence which Jesus made of the gracious one, and grace in the blessings bestowed upon her. May grace deal thus bountifully with us.

We have but two or three moments left for what requires far more space, namely, LOVE. The word blossoms with roses, and suggests the voice of the turtle and the singing of birds. Our time, however, binds us to a narrow path, which we must not leave, although the beds of lilies on either hand invite us.

Love--its source: it bubbles up as a pure rill from the well-head of grace. She loved much, but it was because much had been forgiven. There is no such thing as mere natural love to God. The only true love which can burn in the human breast towards the Lord, is that which the Holy Ghost himself kindles. If thou truly lovest the God who made thee and redeemed thee, thou mayst be well assured that thou art his child, for none but his children have any love to him.

Its secondary cause is faith. The fiftieth verse tells us, "Thy faith hath saved thee." Our souls do not begin with loving Christ, but the first lesson is to trust. Many penitents attempt this difficult task; they aspire to reach the stair-head without treading the steps; they would needs be at the pinnacle of the temple before they have crossed the threshold. First trust Christ for the pardon of thy sin: when thou hast done this, thy sins are forgiven, and then love shall flash to thy heart as the result of gratitude for what the Redeemer has done for thee. Grace is the source of love, but faith is the agent by which love is brought to us.

The food of love is a sense of sin, and a grateful sense of forgiveness. If you and I felt more deeply the guilt of our past lives, we should love Jesus Christ better. If we have but a clearer sense that our sins

deserve the deepest hell, that Christ suffered what we ought to have suffered in order to redeem us from our iniquities, we should not be such coldhearted creatures as we are. We are perfectly monstrous in our want of love to Christ, but the true secret of it is a forgetfulness of our ruined and lost natural estate, and a forgetfulness of the sufferings by which we have been redeemed from that condition. O that our love might feed itself this day, and find a renewal of its strength in remembering what sovereign grace has done.

Love in the narrative before us shines in the fact that the service the woman rendered to our Lord was perfectly voluntary. No one suggested it, much less pressed it upon her. It takes the gloss off our service when we need to be dragged to it, or pushed forward by some energetic pleader. Brethren, the anointing was impromptu with her. Christ was there, and it was at her own suggestion that she anointed his feet. Mary of Bethany had not then set the example: the woman who was a sinner was an original in her service. In these days we have many inventors and discoverers for our temporal use and service, why should we not have inventors for Jesus who will bring out new projects of usefulness? We are most of us content to travel in the old rut, but if we had more love to Jesus we should be more eccentric, and should have a degree of freshness about our service which at present is all too rare. Lord, give us the love which can lead the way!

Her service to Jesus was personal. She did it all herself, and all to him. Do you notice how many times the pronoun occurs in our text? "She stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment." She served Christ himself. It was neither service to Peter, nor James, nor John, nor yet to the poor or sick of the city, but to the Master himself; and, depend upon it, when our love is in active exercise, our piety will be immediately towards Christ--we shall sing to him, pray to him, teach for him, preach for him, live to him. Forgetfulness of the personality of Christ takes away the very vitality of our religion. How much better will you teach, this afternoon, in your Sabbath-school class, if you teach your children for Christ! How much better will you go forth this evening to tell to others the way of salvation, if you go to do it for his sake! Then you court no man's smile--you fear no man's frown. It is enough for you that you have done it for the Master, and if the Master accepts it you have the reward in that very fact.

The woman's service showed her love in that it was fervent. There was so much affection in it--nothing conventional; no following chilly propriety, no hesitating enquiry for precedents. Why did she kiss his feet? Was it not a superfluity? What was the good of it? Did it not look sentimental, affected, sensuous, indelicate? Little did she care how it looked; she knew what she meant. She could not do otherwise. Her whole soul went out in love, she acted naturally as her heart dictated, and, brethren, she acted well. O for more of this guileless piety, which hurls decorum and regulation to the winds. Ah, throw your souls into the service of Christ; let your heart burn in his presence, and let all your soul belong to Jesus. Serve not your Master as though you were half asleep, do not work with drooping hands and half-closed eyes, but wake up the whole of your powers and passions: for such love as he has shown to you, give the most awakened and quickened love in return. O for more of this love! If I might only pray one prayer this morning, I think it should be that the flaming torch of the love of Jesus should be brought into every one of our hearts, and that all our passions should be set a blaze with love to him.

One thought more, and I am done. This woman's love is a lesson to us in the opportunity which she seized. She was evidently but just pardoned: she was rather a weeper than one who had learned to rejoice, and yet for all that, she would serve him at the first dawn of her spiritual life. Now, you young converts, no longer say, "We will do something for Christ in a few years' time, when we have made our calling and election sure; we will wait till we have grown in grace, and then try to do what we can." No, no,

but as soon as you are washed, bring your offering to Jesus. The very day of your conversion, enlist in his army, for speedy obedience is beautiful. Perhaps if this woman had lingered, she had never anointed the Lord at all; but in the hot flush of her first love, she did well to perform at once this zealous, fervent act. Young converts maintain, by God's grace, the warmth of the blood which circulates in the church's veins. Old churches generally become diseased churches when they cease to grow. I do not know a church in all England without conversions which is at all in a happy spiritual state. The fact is, the fresh comers stir us all up by their fervour, their simplicity, their childlike confidence. Now, beloved ones, we encourage you to show this. For our sakes, for your own sakes, for Christ's sake, do not hesitate--if there be anything you can do, though you are uneducated in the divine school, do it. Though there may be a dozen blunders in the method, yet do it, for Christ will accept it. The Pharisee may cavil--well, perhaps it may keep his tongue from other mischief--let him cavil, you can bear it, Christ will defend you, Jesus will accept you; and as a reward for doing what you can, he may be pleased to give you grace to do more, and may breathe over you a full assurance of faith, which had you been idle you might not for years have attained; and he may give you a peace of conscience in serving him which, had you sat still, might never have come to you. I beseech all of you who love Jesus, do not hide the light you have under a bushel, but come out and show it. If you have but a little faith, use it; if you have only a grain of faith, turn it to account. Put the one talent out at interest, and use it for the Master at once, and the Lord bless you in such a work, by increasing your faith and love, and making you to be as this woman was, a highly favoured servant of this blessed Master. May the Lord give every one of you his blessing, for Jesus' sake.

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