

THE VERY FRIEND YOU NEED

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“A friend of publicans and sinners.”
Luke 7:34.

THIS title was given to our Divine Lord and Master by those who were disposed to quibble at Him and were unwilling to be convinced that He was the Messiah. John the Baptist's self-denial was pushed much too far for them. They could not understand a man wearing a garment of camel's hair, with a leather belt about his loins and whose food was locusts and wild honey. The man was either too good for this world, or he was not in his right mind. “He has a devil,” they said, as they turned away from him. But they could not say this of the Savior, for He ate and drank as others ate and drank, and made no difficulty at all about meats and drinks—so they said of Him—“He is a gluttonous Man and a winebibber—a friend of publicans and sinners.” Thus our text comes to us as the language of certain gentry who said, even of the Savior, that they could not listen to Him because He seemed to be a Man who went in and out with ordinary people and did not distinguish Himself by being an ascetic.

I also heard a man say, some time ago, that he could not listen to a certain preacher because, unhappily for him, he happened to be very stout—he could profit by the ministry of a man who was very *thin*, for the objector thought he looked more saintly! Well, it may be so with some people, but, for my part, if anybody can do me good, whether he is stout or thin, I shall make no question about that matter! Whether he is an inch or two shorter or taller will not be a question for me to consider. I think that I should never refrain from consulting with an eminent physician because he happened to have black hair, or light hair, or any peculiarity of that kind! Yet people are often so indifferent about their *soul affairs* that the littlest trifle in a service, the tiniest accidental thing will often keep them from listening to the most weighty Truths of God that concern their immortal interests!

Now let us come to this title of our Master. They called Him, “a friend of publicans and sinners.” It is somewhat noticeable that He quotes this saying Himself. Probably neither Matthew, nor Mark, nor Luke, nor John would have told us that they called Jesus, “a friend of publicans and sinners” if He had not repeated it, Himself. It is clear from this fact that He was not in the least ashamed of the title! He repeats it almost as if He enjoyed it, as if He took the title home to Himself and wore it as some distinction which He was glad to have! He, Himself, says it and He takes care to say it again and to bid both Matthew and Luke record it, that He was called, “a friend of publicans and sinners.” What He was not ashamed to repeat, we are not ashamed to think of at this service! So, first of all, let us notice that *this saying, in the sense in which they meant it, was not true*. But, secondly, *in a higher and better sense than they understood it, it was true*. When we have thought over these two points, we will, in the third place, ask one another, “*Since it is true that Christ is a friend of publicans and sinners, what then?*”

I. First, then, IN THE SENSE IN WHICH THEY MEANT IT, THIS SAYING WAS NOT TRUE.

The Lord Jesus Christ was *not* “a friend of publicans and sinners” *in the sense of being in the least like them*. Our proverb says, “A man is known by the company he keeps,” but you could not have known the Lord Jesus Christ by the company *He* kept. It would be strictly true to say of Him that He was “holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners”—that even when He was present with them and received them, and ate with them—yet still there was a grave distinction between Him and them so that you could never consider Him to be of the same class with them. No, Brothers and Sisters, His bitterest enemies could not truly lay any sin to His charge! They had to hire false witnesses to make up an accusation against Him and when they had made it up, there was really nothing in it. The quick-eyed prince of this

world, Satan, himself, could find nothing sinful in Him. And the princes of this world, whose eyes, through their malice, had become like the eyes of lynxes, yet could not discover anything for which they could blame Him. He was not like they were. He was not like any sinner, He was not like the drunkard, He was not like the adulterer, He was not like the thief, nor was He in the least like the hypocritical Pharisee who, with all his attempts to appear righteous, was not really like the Savior. So, Christ was *not* “a friend of publicans and sinners” in the sense of being like they were.

And, in the second place, He was not “a friend of publicans and sinners” *in the sense of aiding or abetting them in evil*. He never said a single word that could encourage any man to sin. He never did a single act by which any man would have said that he was helped to be a transgressor. I do not suppose that any other man ever lived who could be truthfully said to be harmless, for all of us do *some* harm, even if unconsciously. Our example, either in its defects or in its excesses, must be injurious to *somebody*. Even those who endeavor to keep their example as pure, clean and worthy of imitation as possible, yet, perhaps, sometimes lose their temper, or occasionally speak unadvisedly with their lips, or, now and then forget what they ought to have remembered and thus incidentally do harm. But our Lord Jesus Christ never did. No one among us here was ever led by the example of Christ to do harm. His example is matchless in this respect that if we copied it as far as it is imitable, we would only have copied *perfection* and followed on after the highest virtue! There may be some who join with publicans and sinners, so eating and drinking with them as to encourage gluttony and drunkenness—so singing and laughing with them as to multiply wantonness and uncleanness—but this could never be said of the Savior. He was not like they were nor did He aid them, so He was not, in that sense, a “friend of publicans and sinners.”

And, furthermore, *He never uttered principles which would encourage persons in sin*, or which would help their consciences to be quiet while they indulged their vices. Alas, in modern times there have been some who, even from the pulpit, have taught men that sin is a trifle and, with regard to the future state, they have either denied its existence, or have tried to make it so pleasant to the ungodly that it seems if you followed the preacher’s leading, you might as well die impenitent as fall asleep a Believer in Jesus! They have either denied that there is any wrath to come, or they have smoothed it over and made the descent to the Pit to be *pleasant* to men. This is setting a trap to catch men’s souls—but Christ never did that. Such as He loved the sinner, He denounced his sin and proclaimed the judgment to come in words most striking and terrible! Where can you find, in all the books you may read—even in the writings of those mediaeval preachers which are so generally condemned, or in the works of those old-fashioned Puritan preachers who are so sneered at, nowadays—words that equal in their crash of terror the sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ? O Sirs, if you do not care to read the Epistles, read the records of the four Evangelists and note what Jesus said! He never made the way of sin to appear pleasant, nor tried to minimize the dread result of iniquity. No, He was not, in that sense, “a friend of publicans and sinners.” He was a better friend to them than He would have been if He had acted like that! He dealt more honestly with them and did not smooth their path with flatteries.

And once again, Jesus was not “a friend of publicans and sinners” *in the sense that He ever courted popularity among them*. Many of them would have taken Him by force and made Him a king, but He hid Himself from them. They “drew near to Him for to hear Him,” but He never said a single syllable to pander to their depraved tastes, or to ease them in their consciences while continuing in their sins! He aimed at winning their souls, but not at winning their applause. I heard of one who, at the election, advertised himself as, “the friend of the working man.” I daresay the working man would find it difficult to discover any particular friendship in him, now that he has become a Member of Parliament! It is very easy to profess to be a friend of anybody when there is something to be gained by it! But our Lord and Savior had nothing to get out of those He met while here on earth. He had everything to *give* to them and He *did* give all that He had, yes, and Himself, also! But He never cajoled them, or sought their friendship, that He might win their acclamations. So it was not true that He went about among men trying to ingratiate Himself with the lowest of the low and the vilest of the vile. Nothing of the kind! Christ always stands out before us as the advocate and pattern of everything that is pure, true, right and noble, so that, *in the sense intended by these quibblers*, He was *not* “a friend of publicans and sinners.”

II. But now, dear Friends, I have a much more pleasant matter to speak of when I say that IN A HIGHER AND BETTER SENSE, THIS SAYING WAS TRUE and it is *still* true that Jesus Christ is “a friend of publicans and sinners.”

He was, first of all, *a most hearty and affectionate friend to guilty men*. His whole soul was filled with love to men while they were yet sinners and enemies to Himself. It was this that made Him leave His Father’s court and all the royal-

ties of Heaven to come and be born in a stable, and laid in a manger—and to labor in a carpenter’s shop and to become the poorest of the poor and the most despised and rejected of men! All this was because He loved men, not only as men, but as *guilty* men. Their guilt excited His pity, for He knew the misery which lies concealed behind the apparent pleasure of sin. And to deliver guilty men from the consequences of their sin, He came to live where He could not have a place to lay His head, where, at the last, He did not even have a garment with which to cover His naked body! Our Lord Jesus was a truly sincere, intensely affectionate, earnest Friend—never before or after did any man have a nature so intensely affectionate as had the Lord Jesus Christ! He always seems to me as if He combined in His blessed Person both the sexes of our common humanity, as if He were the perfection of all that can be found in man and woman, too—so tender and so gentle, and yet so strong. The masculine, with all its force, and the feminine, with all its gentleness and sympathy, were united in Christ! He never thought of sinners without love, never looked at them without pity, never heard their cruel words without returning them good wishes, never saw their miseries without being moved with compassion. He was a model of gentleness such as you and I may well desire to imitate, but shall never reach. He was “a friend of publicans and sinners” in the intense affection of His heart.

You need not wonder, therefore, that I add, in the next place, that He was “a friend of publicans and sinners” *in a very practical manner*, for intensity of heart is sure to bring forth fruit. Tell me that you love me and it will come to very little if you only love me in words. But if there is true love, there will be corresponding *action*, there will be *proofs* of that affection. Our Savior proved His love to men in His very coming to this earth, as I have already said, but when He was here, He went about doing good. He never was invited to do good to any and refused, however lowly—and, let me add, however polluted they might be, they were always welcome to His benediction. He went about preaching the Gospel which could elevate those who were fallen and comfort those who were despairing and, at the last, He proved His love in the highest conceivable manner. If a good shepherd laid down his life for his sheep and, in doing so, was proved to be good, did not Jesus do so? Let me quote those blessed words of the Apostle Peter—there is more music in them than in all Homer’s poetry—“Who His own Self bore our sins in His own body on the tree.” That we might live, He died! That we might be cleansed from our iniquities, the Lord has laid them all on Him! O Sinners, Christ is, indeed, your Friend, since, by His death, He has already done for you all that Almighty Love could suggest and Omnipotent Love could carry out! Yes, and rising from the grave and mounting to His Throne, He made intercession for the transgressors and He continues to prove His love to sinners by daily pleading for them! The prayer He commenced on earth has never closed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Oh, yes, He is intensely, deeply affectionate within Himself, but He is abundantly and practically the Friend of sinners by what He does for them! How I wish that some of you would prove this by going to Him, that He might exercise upon you all the matchless skill of His inimitable Grace!

Further, Beloved, I call your attention to this fact, that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Friend of sinners *in the wisest possible sense*. He is affectionate and practical, but He is also wise. You know that there are several ways of proving yourself a man’s friend. There is a man who calls upon one whom he regards as his friend and he says, “Friend, I need you to give me some drink.” And his friend says to him, “There is the bottle—take as much as you like.” A man who acts like that is only worthy to be called a foe! The poor fellow has another friend upon whom he calls and, to his request, his other friend replies, “I cannot give you strong drink, for I believe that it would greatly injure you. I look upon it as a mischievous thing and I am afraid the habit of drinking is growing upon you. Excuse me, but I cannot give it to you.” I think you will all agree that this last is much the wiser friend! I know persons to whom, if you go and hint to them what advice you would like them to give you, they will give you that advice, directly. When people come to me to ask for advice, I generally know that they have made up their minds as to the advice I am to give them and, if they find that I advise what they wish, they think me very wise! A wise friend knows that though he might ingratiate himself for a moment by giving congenial advice, yet, by-and-by, when it turns out for evil, he would have done his friend an ill turn and would be blamed for having done so. The wise friend often throws cold water on our plans and says, “You are quite wrong,” although we would have wished him to have said, “You are right.”

The Lord Jesus Christ is such a wise Friend that He says to the sinner, “Come, Friend, if you would be happy, you must give up that sin.” He does not say, “I will be your friend and help you through the scrapes into which you have got through your sin.” “No,” says Christ, “I will help you *out* of your sin if you will trust Me, but if you will keep your sin, you will have to smart for it and I will not help you out of that sorrow.” He comes to you, my dear Friend, and He says,

“You want to be happy, but that is not the most important point—you must first be *holy* before you can be happy.” “O Lord Jesus!” says the sinner, “I want peace.” “No,” says Jesus, “you do not need peace—it would be injurious to you to have peace in your present condition—you must have, first, *purity*. I must, first of all, show you where you are wrong and set you right.” As He does it, sometimes we cry out, “It is very rough treatment, Lord!” I have known, in cases of surgery, that a patient has been very anxious for the healing of the wound. “No,” says the skillful surgeon, “not yet. There is much proud flesh which must first be taken away. We must not close this wound yet. It must be left open, for there is much that must still come forth from it if we are to have a permanent cure.” Thus does the Lord Jesus Christ often deal with sinners. He is their true Friend even when He lays the axe to the root of their tree of self-righteousness and begins to cut it down! He means to make sure work and abiding work, so He bids the sinner renounce his sin, repent of his transgressions and seek that complete change of heart which will produce a radical change of life. Christ is “a friend of publicans and sinners” in a very wise sense.

And, Beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ is “a friend of publicans and sinners” *in a very intense sense*. There is an old proverb which says, “A friend in need is a friend, indeed.” Christ is the Friend of sinners in their time of need. You, Sir, have gone on in profligacy and extravagance till you are brought to beggary. Yet even now you may come to Christ! You have ruined your health by sin, yet you may still come to Christ! Possibly you have even disgraced your character by some overt crime, yet you may come to Christ and Christ will come to you! “Oh, but nobody speaks to me!” *He* will speak to you! He will find you alone in your shame and will speak words of saving power to you. Do I address some poor woman who has lost her character and is shunned by everybody? Jesus Christ comes even to you as you stand alone and He says, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more.” The Lord Jesus likes to catch us when we are down at our very lowest. When others say, “Now he is down, keep him down,” Christ says, “Now he is down, up with him!”

There is a story told about the Savior. I do not suppose that it is true, but it ought to be, for it is just what might have happened. It is an old tradition that one day, in the streets of Jerusalem, there lay a dead dog and one kicked the body and said that it had the mange. Another kicked it and said, “How its bones stick out! What a cur it is!” But there came One who stood by this dead dog and said, “What white teeth it has!” He had spied out the only good thing that could be found in the dead dog and, as He went on His way, the people asked, “Who was that?” And others answered, “It was Jesus of Nazareth.” As I have said, I do not suppose that story is true, yet it is just as Christ would have acted and that is the way He does with people—He spies out some good thing or other, if there is any in them—or if there is no good thing in them, He still loves them till He loves them into goodness! He knows the blessed art of getting hold of people at their worst and then and there putting into them some point of brightness of character which delivers them from being utterly cast away! My blessed Master likes picking sinners off the very dunghills of sin! How many poor captives has He fetched from prisons and set them free! How many has He gathered whom the devil, himself, had cast away as worn-out and good for nothing! These are the very persons that He takes and makes to be His beloved ones, who shall wash His feet with their tears and wipe them with the hairs of their head. Yes, Christ Jesus is a Friend of great intensity for He is a Friend in need.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is also the Friend of sinners *for constancy*. He is the friend of the sinner when he begins his sin and He checks him. He is the Friend of the sinner when he goes on in his sin and He warns him. He is the Friend of the sinner when he has grown old in sin and still He holds him back. He is the Friend of the sinner when the sinner gets to be, as it were, farthest gone of all—not only ripe, but rotten! Still does Jesus follow him—the wonderful perseverance of Divine Mercy is a theme that may well excite the marvel of angels! O Sirs, I wish you who have gone far into sin could but feel that still, in His pity, He looks upon you and still, in His love, He pursues you! He is, indeed, the Friend of sinners! You wrote “sinners” in very small letters, once, and then you might have written, “friend,” in equally small letters. But now you write in large capitals—“SINNERS.” Oh, what a size the letters would be if they truly described you! But larger than all is that blessed word, “FRIEND.” As you seem to grow in sin, He seems even more to grow in *friendship* and so you sing to Him—

*“Still does Your good Spirit strive—
With the chief of sinners dwell.”*

Oh, that He would lead you to believe this even now, so that you might fly into His arms! He is the Friend of sinners for His constancy.

I have nearly exhausted my time, so I can only say, my Lord Jesus is the Friend of sinners *in the largest conceivable sense*. There never was a sinner to whom He was not willing to be a Friend! If you, poor Sinner, will but seek Him, He will be found of you. In a revival, perhaps, there may be hundreds coming to Christ—do not think that you will be one too many. And in dull times there may seem to be *none* coming to Christ—do not think that He will refuse you because you are a lonely one! Where do you dwell, my Hearer? Perhaps on some lone moor, or in some far-away glen, or out in the bush—yet Christ is there—so seek Him in the silence of the evening. Or do you work in the midst of the busy city where all is noise and turmoil? Yet He will hear you amidst the hum of labor and the din of traffic—your whispered prayer will reach His ear and heart—

*“Jesus sits on Zion’s hill,
And receives poor sinners still,”*

and that at all hours of the night and all moments of the day! If He should refuse you when you go to Him, you will be the first whom He ever refused—and I am sure He will not begin with you! That cannot be, for Jesus said, “Come to Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” He also said, “Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out.” No, that will never be your case nor mine, Beloved, if we come to Him! It is impossible! So let us rejoice that throughout all time, as long as there is a sinner out of Hell, Christ is ready to be that sinner’s Friend!

III. So I shall close my discourse when I have asked and answered one more question, AS CHRIST IS THE FRIEND OF SINNERS, WHAT THEN?

Well, first, let us do as the sinners used to do in His time, *they drew near to Him*—“Then drew near to Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.” There is a great crowd of people—what a dense throng! Who is that in the middle? It is Jesus of Nazareth, the great Messiah Prophet preaching! Who are those gentlemen standing on the edge of the crowd, wearing broad phylacteries, discussing among themselves and sneering at the doctrine that is being taught? Those are the very respectable people who never do anything wrong—the Scribes and Pharisees—the learned men who know all that can possibly be known by anybody! These people always stand at the very outside of the ring. But who are those in the middle of the throng? And, straightway, some Pharisee holds up his hands in disgust and says, “It is perfectly shocking! Wherever the Nazarene goes, there is always a pack of the riff-raff round Him! Whenever He speaks, you notice that He is surrounded by a lot of tax-gatherers—the scum employed to gather the money for the Romans—for no Jew would do that unless he was very far gone. Do you not see that there is one of them close to His side just now, listening to Him, and the tears are running down his checks? That is the kind of wretch to whom He preaches! And see that woman over there, that is the style of His hearers.”

Now, why did men and women of that kind always get so close to Christ? It was because they felt that He was their Friend. No, Rabbi Simeon, they will never come round *you*, so you need not trouble yourself upon that point. You can gather up your skirts and go home. They will not offend you by getting too close to your heels, for you are no friend of theirs. They know that and, somehow, sympathy draws people, while coldness repels them. I pray the Lord Jesus Christ to exercise that drawing influence over you, my dear Friends. Knowing that you are sinners, come and listen to the sinners’ Friend. Read the writings of the four Evangelists and see what He has said to you—and whenever His Gospel is preached, or anything is said about Him—try to understand it and accept it. You will do so if you are wise.

Next, not only draw near to Him, but *test Him as often as need arises*. There is nothing like putting Christ to the test! In a side street, not far from here, you may have seen in a window this notice, “If any poor girl upon the streets desires to escape from her sinful way of living, she will find a friend inside.” I felt very pleased when that notice in the window was pointed out to me and I think that if I were a poor girl in that sad case, and wished to escape, I would go inside to see what the friend could do for me. The Lord Jesus Christ has put in His window a message of this kind, “Any sinner of any sort who desires to be saved, let Him come to Me.” Now, do not merely stand at the window and read it, but come inside, my poor Brother! Come inside, my Sister! Come to Jesus. Come to Jesus just now!

To get at Him, there is only this to be done—*just trust Him*. Trust Him implicitly, wholly, solely. Trust Him now. When you trust Him, then you are saved, for it is written, “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life.” If you have trusted Christ, you have everlasting life! That act of faith proves that everlasting life has dropped into your bosom and that Christ has said to you, “Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you. Go, and sin no more.”

When you have trusted Christ and proved Him to be your Friend, *proclaim to others what you know of Him*. Whisper it about. You will find some more poor sinners who will be glad to hear the good news! You remember the dog at the hospital that went of his own accord and had his broken leg set—and then he went again with another broken-legged dog? He was a sensible animal and oh, let every poor soul that has received Christ go and find another soul and bring him to Christ! In the depth of winter, at a time when I had a balcony to my study, I put some crumbs out upon it and there came a robin redbreast, first, and he pecked and ate all he could. I do not know his language, but I fancy I can tell what he said, for he went away and came back with ever so many sparrows and other birds! He had said to them, “There are crumbs up here, come and get them.” And they all came and they came in greater numbers every day—and I do not know how it was except that they told one another. One day, whether it was the robin or the sparrows, I do not know, but some of them told a blackbird and he was a bigger fellow than any of them. When he came, he stood near, for I should think, a minute, and then he spied me inside and flew away, for he thought, “That good man does not like blackbirds.” But he did not know me! I was pleased to see him and I should have liked to see a lot of such birds. So the robin went up to him and told him that he had been there for the last three or four days and I had never even threatened him. And, after being persuaded a little, the blackbird came back and the robin seemed to me to be quite pleased to think that he had converted this fellow and brought him back, for they dropped down together on the crumbs, and they had such a joyful feast that they came again and again!

Oh, there are some of you, dear robin redbreasts, that have been here ever so long and have been eating my Master’s crumbs! You have brought some sparrows to the feast—now try to entice a blackbird and if there is one blackbird bigger and bleaker than another, go and fetch him and bring him, for Jesus says that He will cast out none that come to Him by faith—and you may be sure that it is true, for He is “a friend of publicans and sinners.” God bless you all, dear Friends, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

LUKE 7:24-50.

Verse 24. *And when the messengers of John were departed, He began to speak to the people concerning John. What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?* Certainly not! John could never be compared to a reed shaken by the wind, for he was strong, sturdy, firm and steadfast. He was not like so many preachers, nowadays, who are swayed by the ever-changing opinion of the age—the thought of these modern times—and so prove themselves to be mere reeds shaken by the wind.

25. *But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment! Behold, they which are gorgeously appareled, and live delicately, are in kings’ courts.* John had been preaching in the desert with all his might, warning sinners to flee from the wrath to come. He was no court preacher, but a minister to the multitude, who delivered his Heaven-Inspired message in his own straightforward earnest style.

26, 27. *But what did you go out to see? A Prophet? Yes, I say to you, and much more than a Prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, which shall prepare Your way before You.* John was the morning star and Christ the glorious Sun! John was the herald proclaiming the coming of Christ and Christ, Himself, followed close at his heels!

28. *For I say to you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater Prophet than John the Baptist.* His was the highest office of all, immediately to precede Messiah, Himself.

28. *But he that is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he.* We have a fuller Gospel to preach than John had and we may expect to see greater results from the preaching of that Gospel than John could hope to see.

29-32. *And all the people that heard Him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. And the Lord said, Unto what, then, shall I liken the men of this generation? And to what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling, one to another, and saying, We have piped to you, and you have not danced; we have mourned to you, and you have not wept.* These children could not agree as to what game they would play. “Come,” they said, “let us imitate a wedding. We will pipe and you can dance.” But the others would not dance. “Well,” they said, “let us play at *something*. Let us imitate a funeral—we will be the mourners.” Then the others would not weep.

They would agree to nothing that was proposed and that is the point of the Savior's analogy—that there are multitudes of men who always quarrel with any kind of ministry that God may send them. This man's style is much too ornate—he has a superabundance of the flowers of oratory. That other man is much too dull—there is nothing interesting about his discourses. This man is too coarse—he is so rough as even to be vulgar. That other man is too refined and uses language which shoots over people's heads. It is easy to find fault when you want to do so. Any stick will do to beat a dog and any kind of excuse will do to allow your conscience to escape from the message of an earnest ministry. Our Lord told the people that this was the way they had acted towards Himself and John the Baptist.

33. *For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine*—An ascetic of ascetics—

33. *And you say, he has a devil.* “He is out of his mind altogether, possessed by the devil.”

34. *The Son of Man is come eating and drinking*—That is the Lord Jesus, Himself. He comes as a Man among men, and sits with you at your feasts, and does not lead the life of an ascetic.

34. *And you say, Behold a gluttonous Man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!* There was no pleasing them either way! Whichever form of preacher the Lord sent, whether an ascetic or one like themselves, they found fault.

35. *But wisdom is justified of all her children.* There shall come a day when it shall be seen that, after all, God knew best what style of preacher to send. He had work for each man to do and He adapted the man for the work He had entrusted to his charge.

36. *And one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him. And He went into the Pharisee's house and sat down to eat.* Invitations from Pharisees were rather scarce—they did not often ask Christ to their houses. Even before this meal is over, there will be sure to be something like a quarrel, depend upon it!

37. *And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner*—Her name is not given and there are good reasons why it should not be given. Certainly she was not Mary, the sister of Lazarus, nor Mary Magdalene, we may be quite sure of that. Our Savior leaves her in an anonymous condition and it is usually best that converts of this character should not be exhibited and their names made known. I believe that much cruel wrong has been done to reclaimed sinners when they have been pushed to the front. “Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner.”—

37, 38. *When she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him, weeping*—His feet probably lay towards the door as He reclined at the table. And she could readily get at them without becoming too conspicuous in the room—she “stood at His feet behind Him, weeping.”—

38. *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.* What a blessed amalgam of humility, penitence, gratitude and love! All these are seen in what she did, especially in that unbinding of the tresses of her beauty which had been her nets in which she had taken the souls of men. Now she uses these for a towel. She “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.”

39. *Now when the Pharisee which had bid Him, saw it, he spoke within himself*—He did not like to say it in so many words, but he spoke loud enough for himself to hear it and for Christ to hear it, too.

39-44. *Saying, This Man, if He were a Prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that touches Him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you. And he said, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him more? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And He said to him, You have rightly judged. And He turned to the woman and said to Simon, Do you see this woman?—“You did see this woman and you looked upon her with a frowning face. Now take another look at her by the light of My parable.” “Simon, Do you see this woman?”*

44. *I entered into your house*—“Therefore you were bound by the obligations of a host.”—

44. *You gave Me no water for My feet.*—An ordinary commonplace courtesy in the East, almost a necessity for those who have walked far and whose feet are weary and dusty—“You gave Me no water for My feet.”—

44. *But she has washed My feet with tears*—Costly water this! “She has washed My feet with tears.”

44. *And wiped them with the hairs of her head.* “She has done it, she has done it better than you would have done it! She has done it best of all—she has done what you ought to have done—she has done it when there seemed to be no claim upon her to do it.”

45. *You gave me no kiss.*—Though that was the ordinary mode of salutation to an honored guest—

46. *But this woman, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet.* “You said in your heart that if I had been a Prophet, I would have known who and what manner of woman this was. I do know and I am telling you. If you had given Me a kiss, you would only have coldly kissed My brow, but she has found it in her heart to honor Me by kissing My feet. Since I came in, she has not ceased to kiss them, unwashed as they were, and she has not only kissed them, but she has also washed them with her tears.”

46. *My head with oil you did not anoint*—“You, the host, whose duty it was to anoint the head of your guest, did not do it.”—

46. *But this woman has anointed My feet with ointment.* The best oil she possessed or could procure.

47, 48. *Therefore I say to you, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. And He said to her, Your sins are forgiven.* “Not because she has done this, but this is an *evidence* that her sins are forgiven. This act of greater love is the proof that she must be conscious of the greater forgiveness—‘she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.’” It is always like that! Your converted Pharisees have to be made to feel like this woman before they will render love like hers. And if Simon is ever made to feel that his sin, in a certain light, is as great as the sin of this fallen woman, then he will love as much as she does, but not till then. Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” Oh, the marvelous music of that short sentence! If I had to choose from all language the choicest sentence that my ears could hear when under a sense of sin, it would be these four words which the Master addressed to this woman who was a notable public sinner, “Your sins are forgiven.”

49. *And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that also forgives sins?* Now, you see, they begin to mutter and to quibble. What is this poor woman to do? Probably she felt ready to speak up for her Master, but, sometimes, it happens that the Lord Jesus Christ will not permit certain, even of His forgiven ones, to be very prominent.

50. *And He said to the woman, Your faith has saved you; go in peace.* She was best out of the way of all controversy. She would honor Him most by going home and there sweetly singing to His praise and drinking deep draughts of His love. If any of you converts are meeting with those who laugh at you, do not stop where they are, but go about your business with these sweet words of your Master ringing in your ears—“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

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