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## SERMON XIV.

### THE CHARACTER OF THE PARDONED.

ST. LUKE VII. 37, 38.—“Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, 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, 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.”

A SINNER must be either pardoned or lost. We, brethren, are sinners. It is a question therefore which no one of us can too earnestly put to his soul, Are my sins forgiven? Am I a pardoned, or an unpardoned transgressor of the law of heaven? Some of us perhaps are deeply anxious to have this momentous question truly answered. How then shall we proceed? There is no easier way than to open our Bibles, to find there some transgressor whom God himself has declared forgiven, and to see how far his character corresponds with our own.

This text brings such a sinner before us—a woman of Capernaum or Nain. Her name is not mentioned. A few short verses contain all that we know of her history. But we are sure that we are right in turning to her for a standard. The blessed Jesus himself seems to hold her out to us for this purpose. He treats her with peculiar favour; he twice pronounces her forgiven. O may he bless our review of her character to the conviction or comfort of every heart!

I. She is first introduced to our notice, as entering a house wherein our Lord was sitting at meat. It was a pharisee’s house. She was a sinner; a known, open sinner; consequently an unbidden, and doubtless an unwelcome guest. But Christ was under that roof; and thither, regardless of consequences, did her eager feet at once carry her.

Here then becomes visible one of the first marks which distinguish the pardoned—*they seek Christ*; they come to him.

None others seek him. Not the careless—they think not of him. Not the self-righteous—they can do without him. Not all whom conscience stings—thousands of these fly to a giddy world for relief; many try sacraments and prayers, and many more intemperance and sin; some exclaim for a time, with the astonished Peter, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;” a few, even on this side of the grave, cry out in the anguish of their hearts, with the unclean spirits, “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?” and then, like Judas, they rush unbidden to his bar.

But turn to the pardoned. "We would see Jesus," is the language of them all. Nothing can satisfy, nothing can quiet them, but Christ. They seek him more than they seek any thing or every thing beside. There is not one of them, who does not grieve because his cold, wandering heart does not seek him more.

They seek him with different feelings;—sometimes like the Æthiopian convert, rejoicing; sometimes, like Joseph and Mary, sorrowing; sometimes, like the woman who touched the hem of his garment, trembling; but whether happy or sad, in sickness or in health, in trouble or in joy, they are enquiring for Christ, they cannot rest till they find him. In his works, they look for him; in his house, they strive to draw near to him; in prayer, they thirst for his presence. They prize his word, because it testifies of his grace; their mercies are sweetened to them, because in their mercies they see his goodness; they almost love their afflictions, because their afflictions bring him near to their souls. They long for death, for they know death to be the messenger which he sends to fetch his people to himself. And when they think of heaven, this is the prospect which makes their hearts burn the most; not, "We shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more;" not, "We shall have done with sorrow and care;" but, "We shall see Christ; we shall be ever with the Lord."

The pardoned seek Christ;—that mark distinguishes them from the worldly. They seek him as a Saviour;—that separates them from the pharisaic and proud. They seek him as a Sanctifier, a King;—that draws the line between them and all the abusers of his grace. They seek him as a Comforter;—that removes them far away from those who are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."

But the angels seek Christ. We must go farther therefore in search of some other mark of the pardoned. We have it here—

## II. *They have a lively remembrance of their sins.*

Not a word indeed does this woman speak of her guilt; but had she forgotten it? One look at her tells us that it was fresh in her memory, and almost bursting her heart. The pharisee deems her a sinner; a sinner the Holy Spirit calls her; as a sinner, Christ himself addresses her; and could she have spoken, with what feeling would she have echoed the word, and styled herself a sinner, yea, of sinners the chief!

This, we may be told, was her infirmity. O that it were the infirmity of every transgressor on the earth! There are men who contend that pardoned sin should be forgotten. They know no more of the power of godliness than a stone. It can never be forgotten. As soon as it is cancelled in heaven, it is written "with a pen of iron" in the memory for ever. The murderer may forget his crimes, Judas his treason, and all hell its rebellion; but as long as the

pardoned have minds that can work, and hearts that can feel, not all the sorrows of life, nor all the joys of heaven, nor all the ages of eternity, can blot out the remembrance of their guilt or weaken its power. It is as lasting as pardon itself. A sense of pardon keeps it alive. A man never rightly feels himself a sinner, till he looks with an eye of faith on Christ as his Saviour; till he begins to hope that wrath is escaped and heaven won. "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways and your doings that were not good," says the Lord to Israel. And when was this remembrance to begin? Not till he had "saved them from all their uncleannesses;" not till he had said to them, "Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."

Look at the prodigal. "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." And what was the effect of all this tenderness? The very effect which the enjoyment of redeeming love produces in every breast. The first words which came from that contrite rebel, were a confession of his guilt. The son said unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

And look higher. Why is that new song in heaven so loud? Why are the pardoned the most fervent there in their hosannahs and praise? Because they know that they are pardoned. They have taken up into heaven a remembrance of the sins which they committed upon earth, they compare their former state with their present, they see something of the amazing love which has saved them; and though the voice of all the angels were silenced, they could not hold their peace; they would still make the courts of heaven ring with this one sound, "Salvation;" they would still say, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us;" they would still cry aloud, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins, be glory and dominion for ever."

But an objection may be raised even here—sin is remembered in hell, as well as in heaven; by many of the condemned on earth, as well as the justified. Something more peculiar yet is wanting to mark the forgiven transgressor. This penitent will supply it.

### III. *The pardoned remember their sins with a softening and humbling sorrow.*

This can be said of none other. The angels that sinned, are as proud in their wretchedness now, as in the first hour of their fall. And who have been among the most high-minded and hardened on earth? They who have suffered the most from the anguish of remorse. Did Cain ever weep for sin? Did Pharaoh humble himself? Did Judas pray?

There is a sorrow for past transgressions, which proves no more in our favour, than a fever in the brain or a whirlwind in the air. No holy effects

follow it: it may break our hearts, but it will never subdue them. No gracious dispositions produce it: a troubled conscience, a dread of shame, a fear of punishment—these are its sources. Death is its end. But look at that consciousness of guilt which distinguishes the accepted penitent. It lays the proudest in the dust. This woman was once probably an object of admiration, if not of love; flattered perhaps by the great, and seated on high with the rich. Where is she now? At the feet of a despised Nazarene.

Here we must remember that the ancient Jews did not sit at their meals as is usual among ourselves. They lay reclined on couches placed round their tables. The feet of Jesus, on this occasion, were consequently not on the ground, but on the couch whereon he was sitting. Near them this sinner took her station. “She stood at the feet” of Jesus. Mary sat at his feet when she listened to his words at Bethany. This was a humble station; but this woman stands in his presence, and stands at his feet. And not only so, she deems herself unworthy to appear before his face; she stands “behind him.” And what is her errand there? She came to pour ointment on his head, but she cannot fulfil her purpose. Trembling diffidence restrains her hand. Her heart is melting within her. All she can do is to weep. She “stood at his feet behind him weeping.” And the tears which she shed, were not a few. They fell so fast, that they served to wash the blessed feet of her Lord. And they fell for a long time. The Saviour began to speak, but her tears did not cease. O what a scene was this! An angel could hardly have looked on it without wishing to share its emotions.

Will any man say that the tears shed here were the tears of weakness or folly? that they flowed from merely natural causes? Then let him tell us whence flowed the tears of the manly Peter, when he went out from the high priest’s palace, and “wept bitterly.” Let him tell us why Jacob “wept and made supplication;”—why the noble Paul served God “with many tears;”— why the tears of David were his “meat day and night.” And then let him go a step farther. Let him tell us that a single tear for sin never falls from his own dry eye; that all his life long his transgressions have never perhaps cost him a sigh. What answer shall we make him? We would tell him to look upwards; there dwells an offended Father;—downwards; there lies a dark and woe-worn hell;—backward; he will see mercies abused, patience wasted, and sins committed, which might make an angel mourn;—forward; a tremendous eternity;—within him; a polluted and ruined heart;—without him; a miserable and wicked world, a world which he has loved better than his God. If these things have not power to move him, we will tell him of an incarnate God; of the Babe of Bethlehem; of the Man of sorrows we have seen at Golgotha; of the love, and tears, and cross, of Jesus Christ. We will tell him of mercy that even now does not abandon him; of grace that even yet is sounding in his ears, “Why will ye die?” And then

if that man still makes scorn of the penitent transgressor's sorrow, we will say, and say it almost weeping, that we would not have our souls in his soul's stead for a thousand worlds.

Contrition, shame, humiliation, self-loathing, sorrow pungent, secret, and lasting—these are the marks which stamp a sinner for heaven. These are the things which make angels rejoice, as they look on a worm of the dust, and cause the Redeemer himself to call him blessed.

Do you need any proof that these sayings are true? O that your own hearts could afford it! O that your own experience rendered every other testimony needless! But hear the voice of Jehovah. He is speaking to Israel; "I will establish my covenant with thee;"—for what purpose? "that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God." Hear a weeping Saviour's testimony; "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." "Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh."

Here we might stop. Angels may seek Christ, as well as the pardoned; the condemned and lost may remember their sins; but neither on earth, in heaven, or in hell, can this humiliation, this sorrow for sin, be found, except in a pardoned soul. But there is one feature more in the character of the forgiven, which the conduct of this woman will not suffer us to overlook.

IV. *They have a peculiar love for Christ their Lord;* such a love, brethren, as passes the understanding of a cold-hearted world; a love that angels, in the very presence of their Lord, cannot feel.

We all say that Christ must be loved, but what is the love which men in general bear him? Let them offer it one to another; let a child offer such love to a parent, or a man to his friend— it would be scorned. It is cold, selfish, without feeling or life; a love of profession and form, drawing at times a few words of respect from the lips, but never exciting in the heart one throb or glow. It is less costly than the Hindoo's love for his idol? it is almost as low as the African's love for the evil spirit at whose image he trembles.

"Seest thou this woman?" said Jesus to Simon. It was her love that he bid him mark. And what was that? The homage which greatness extorts? the respect which exalted goodness commands? the obedience and service which a cold sense of duty reluctantly yields? It was more. It was an emotion, a feeling; a pure, and deep, and all-conquering principle; an affection, such as Christ only can excite, and his Spirit only can give. It was that love to which a consciousness of pardon ever gives birth in a sinner's breast. Consider its character.

It was a *tender* love; a love which delights in its object, and seeks to be near it; a love which can say with the pardoned David, "In thy presence is fulness of joy." She came to Jesus; she stood near him; she kissed his feet.

It was an *active* love. It said not a word, but it did all that it could. Simon himself ought to have washed the feet of Christ. The act would have been no more than the usual hospitality of the country required. But he was too haughty to perform such an office for such a guest. This woman could not bear the neglect. A flood of tears gushed from her eyes; and these supplied the place of the water, which the hands of others ought to have administered.

It was a *self-denying* love. To pour oil on the head was another mark of respect sometimes offered in eastern countries to strangers. It was less usual than washing the feet, and not, in ordinary cases, involving in its omission any breach of civility. This sinner did not expect Christ to be thus honoured in the house of a pharisee; but shall he go without any mark of honour, which she can pay him? No. Like Mary of Bethany, she takes a box of the most precious ointment which the country afforded, and hastened with it to her Lord. When by his side, she pours the ointment on the feet which the haughty pharisee had dishonoured, and then she "wipes them with the hairs of her head." She deems no sacrifice too great, so that it honours Christ; no service mean, that he will accept. Joyfully would she have forsaken all the world for him, and followed him as his servant all the days of her life. Nay, who can look at this woman, and not see at a glance, that she would have rejoiced to shed her heart's blood for that Nazarene?

And then the love which she bore to him, was a *delightful* love; a love which made her happy. It mingled with her humiliation and shame, and took from them much of their bitterness. It almost turned her sorrow into joy. It made her very tears pleasant to her, the sweetest doubtless she had ever known. Of all the women on the earth, she perhaps at that moment was the happiest. It seems as though a step would have taken her to heaven; as though she could in a moment have broken out into its song, and opened her heart to its joys. And what can be more blessed, than to lie at the feet of Christ? to have our hard hearts melted there in penitence and love, and then to have that whisper from heaven enter the soul, "Thy sins are forgiven?" All that is higher than this, is not on earth; it must be looked for in the heavens.

This, brethren, is the sinner, whose character we proposed to examine. We have taken only a partial survey of it. There is enough however in what we have seen, to show us *how many graces depend on a simple application to the Saviour for mercy.*

The humility, contrition, and love, which we have been contemplating, were not merely the signs of a pardon conferred; they were the fruits of a

pardon received. They all sprang out of that faith which brought this woman as a sinner to Christ; they all flowed from a belief of his pardoning grace. She “loved much, because her sins which were many, had been forgiven.” And to what does our Lord attribute her safety, her peace, her salvation? To the very faith which brought her to him for pardon. He said to her, “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”

Some of us then may discover here why we are so ungodly and comfortless—we are never on our knees at a footstool of mercy. Others may see why their graces are so languid and their hopes so low—they are seldom pleading the blood of Christ for forgiveness. When once they have caught a faint view of pardon, many appear to act as though they needed pardon no more. They no longer seek it. They imagine that in the new title of children of God, they have lost the character of sinners. This notion has been the bane of thousands. It has first puffed up and then ruined many a soul. It has clouded the views, and marred the comforts, and hindered the progress, of many more. Renounce it, brethren. However sanctified and however blessed, you must enter heaven at last as sinners. O be content, while on earth, to stand before God as sinners. Is the hardness of your hearts a grief to you? Is their pride a burden? Is their want of love a sorrow and a shame? Do your souls ache for an assurance of pardon? O then seek this assurance, seek peace, seek love, seek a broken and contrite spirit, in this one prayer, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

We learn also here *how to judge of the state of our own souls.*

Twice does our Lord call this woman forgiven. Not satisfied with telling Simon that her guilt was cancelled, he says to her, unasked, “Thy sins are forgiven.” And when does he say this? While she is standing behind him weeping; while she is washing his feet with her tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head. We need not then go up to the skies to see whether our iniquities are blotted out from the records of heaven; nor must we trust to convictions, or impressions, or feelings. We must look into our hearts; we must examine our dispositions and lives; we must endeavour to discover in ourselves the marks which distinguish all the pardoned of God.

Are these marks visible on you? Have you beheld in the character of this silent penitent, any resemblance to your own? We will not say, do you seek Christ so earnestly as she sought him? is your remembrance of sin as lively as hers; your sorrow as humbling and softening; your love as tender, and warm, and active, and self-denying, and blessed? She had been a great sinner; and all her feelings and actions were in some degree proportioned to the greatness of her sin. We will come lower. Do you really love Christ more than you love any earthly friend, more than you love any earthly sin? Do you love him, because you have received from his hands a pardon bestowed by his mercy, and bought with his blood? Do you seek his favour

and presence more than you seek money, or pleasure, or any thing which the world can give? Is your remembrance of sin such as would make it as easy for you to cease to breathe, as to cease from prayer for forgiveness? Do you so mourn over it, as to feel it to be your chief sorrow? and are you so humbled under a sense of it, as to account it your chief, your only shame?

Trust not to any one of these things. They were all in this woman. Not a justified sinner has ever trodden the earth, in whom, in a greater or less degree, they have not all been found. If they are not in you; if your eye which can weep under worldly sorrows, is dry as a desert over spiritual evils, and your heart hard as a rock at the mention of spiritual mercies, be assured that the forgiveness you hope in, is not that which this woman received, nor that which Christ bestows. It is a forged pardon. It comes from the father of lies. And what will it profit you? No more than an acquittal written with his own hand, would profit a criminal who has been tried and condemned. It will answer no other purpose than to deceive, to harden, and destroy you.

Think of your situation, brethren. You are unpardoned sinners in a dying world, on the verge of a wretched, endless hell. "The Judge is at the door." The ministers of vengeance are at hand. A few hours only are left you for escape. O let them not run to waste. "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."