

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE VII. 36–50.

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 meat.

37 And, 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,

38 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.

39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw *it*, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman *this is* that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that *he*, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head.

45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loveth little.

48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

50 And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

THE deeply interesting narrative contained in these verses, is only found in the Gospel of St. Luke. In order to see the full beauty of the story, we should read, in connection with it, the eleventh chapter of St. Matthew. We shall then discover the striking fact, that the woman whose conduct is here recorded, most likely owed her conversion to the well-known words, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." That wondrous invitation, in all human probability, was the saving of her soul, and gave her that sense of peace for which we see her so grateful.—A full offer of free pardon is generally God's chosen instrument for bringing the chief of sinners to repentance.

We see in this passage that *men may show some outward respect to Christ, and yet remain unconverted*. The Pharisee before us is a case in point. He showed our Lord Jesus Christ more respect than many did. He even "desired Him that He would eat with him." Yet all this time he was profoundly ignorant of the nature of Christ's Gospel. His proud heart secretly revolted at the sight of a poor contrite sinner being allowed to wash our Lord's feet. And even the hospitality he showed appears to have been cold and niggardly. Our Lord Himself says, "Thou gavest me no water for my feet:— thou gavest me no kiss:—my head with oil thou didst not anoint." In short, in all that the Pharisee did, there was one great defect. There was

outward civility, but there was no heart-love.

We shall do well to remember the case of this Pharisee. It is quite possible to have a decent form of religion, and yet to know nothing of the Gospel of Christ,—to treat Christianity with respect, and yet to be utterly blind about its cardinal doctrines,—to behave with great correctness and propriety at Church, and yet to hate justification by faith, and salvation by grace, with a deadly hatred. Do we really feel affection toward the Lord Jesus? Can we say, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee?” Have we cordially embraced His whole Gospel? Are we willing to enter heaven side by side with the chief of sinners, and to owe all our hopes to free grace?—These are questions which we ought to consider. If we cannot answer them satisfactorily, we are in no respect better than Simon the Pharisee; and our Lord might say to us, “I have somewhat to say unto thee.”

We see, in the next place, in this passage, *that grateful love is the secret of doing much for Christ*. The penitent woman, in the story before us, showed far more honour to our Lord than the Pharisee had done. She “stood at His feet behind Him weeping.” She “washed His feet with tears.” She “wiped them with the hairs of her head.” She “kissed His feet, and anointed them with costly ointment.”—No stronger proofs of reverence and respect could she have given, and the secret of her giving such proofs, was love. She loved our Lord, and she thought nothing too much to do for Him. She felt deeply grateful to our Lord, and she thought no mark of gratitude too costly to bestow on Him.

More “doing” for Christ is the universal demand of all the Churches. It is the one point on which all are agreed. All desire to see among Christians, more good works, more self-denial, more practical obedience to Christ’s commands. But what will produce these things? Nothing, nothing but love. There never will be more done for Christ till there is more hearty love to Christ Himself. The fear of punishment, the desire of reward, the sense of duty, are all useful arguments, in their way, to persuade men to holiness. But they are all weak and powerless, until a man loves Christ. Once let that mighty principle get hold of a man, and you will see his whole life changed.

Let us never forget this. However much the world may sneer at “feelings” in religion, and however false or unhealthy religious feelings may sometimes be, the great truth still remains behind, that *feeling* is the secret of doing. The heart must be engaged for Christ, or the hands will soon hang down. The affections must be enlisted into His service, or our obedience will soon stand still. It will always be the loving workman who will do most in the Lord’s vineyard.

We see lastly, in this passage, that a *sense of having our sins forgiven is the mainspring and life-blood of love to Christ*. This, beyond doubt, was the lesson which our Lord wished Simon the Pharisee to learn, when He told

him the story of the two debtors. "One owed his creditor five hundred pence, and the other fifty." Both had "nothing to pay," and both were forgiven freely. And then came the searching question: "Which of them will love him most?" Here was the true explanation, our Lord told Simon, of the deep love which the penitent woman before Him had displayed. Her many tears, her deep affection, her public reverence, her action in anointing His feet, were all traceable to one cause. She had been much forgiven, and so she loved much.—Her love was the effect of her forgiveness, not the cause,—the consequence of her forgiveness, not the condition,—the result of her forgiveness, not the reason,—the fruit of her forgiveness, not the root. Would the Pharisee know why this woman showed so much love? It was because she felt much forgiven.—Would he know why he himself had shown his guest so little love? It was because he felt under no obligation,—had no consciousness of having obtained forgiveness,—had no sense of debt to Christ.

For ever let the mighty principle laid down by our Lord in this passage, abide in our memories, and sink down into our hearts. It is one of the great corner-stones of the whole Gospel. It is one of the master-keys to unlock the secrets of the kingdom of God. The only way to make men holy, is to teach and preach free and full forgiveness through Jesus Christ. The secret of being holy ourselves, is to know and feel that Christ has pardoned our sins. Peace with God is the only root that will bear the fruit of holiness. Forgiveness must go before sanctification. We shall do nothing till we are reconciled to God.—This is the first step in religion. We must work from life, and not for life. Our best works before we are justified are little better than splendid sins. We must live by faith in the Son of God, and then, and not till then, we shall walk in His ways. The heart which has experienced the pardoning love of Christ, is the heart which loves Christ, and strives to glorify Him.

Let us leave the passage with a deep sense of our Lord Jesus Christ's amazing mercy and compassion to the chief of sinners. Let us see in His kindness to the woman, of whom we have been reading, an encouragement to any one, however bad he may be, to come to Him for pardon and forgiveness. That word of His shall never be broken, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Never, never need any one despair of salvation, if he will only come to Christ.

Let us ask ourselves, in conclusion, What we are doing for Christ's glory? What kind of lives are we living? What proof are we making of our love to Him who loved us, and died for our sins? These are serious questions. If we cannot answer them satisfactorily, we may well doubt whether we are forgiven. The hope of forgiveness which is not accompanied by love in the life is no hope at all. The man whose sins are really cleansed away will al-

ways show by his ways that he loves the Saviour who cleansed them.

NOTES. LUKE VII. 36–50.

- 36.—[*And one of the Pharisees desired him.*] We know nothing of this Pharisee, except his name, Simon. There is no proof that he was the same as “Simon the leper,” mentioned in Mark xiv. He certainly was not Simon Peter, or Simon Zelotes.

We are not told the place at which the circumstances here recorded took place. It is highly probable that it was Nain, where the widow’s son was raised.

Our Lord had just been saying, that He was called “the friend of publicans and sinners.” St Luke proceeds at once to show, that He was so indeed, and was not ashamed of the name.

[*He went into the Pharisee’s house.*] Our Lord’s conduct in eating at the Pharisee’s table, is quoted by some Christians in defence of the practice of keeping up intimacy with unconverted people, and going to dinner parties and entertainments at their houses.

Those who use such an argument would do well to remember our Lord’s behaviour on this occasion. He carried his “Father’s business” with Him to the Pharisee’s table. He testified against the Pharisee’s besetting sin. He explained to the Pharisee the nature of free forgiveness of sins, and the secret of true love to Himself. He declared the saving nature of faith. If Christians who argue in favour of intimacy with unconverted people, will visit their houses in the spirit of our Lord, and speak and behave as He did, let them by all means continue the practice. But do they speak and behave at the tables of their unconverted acquaintances, as Jesus did at Simon’s table? This is a question they would do well to answer.

Bucer’s note on this point is worth reading.

[*Sat down to meat.*] The Greek word so translated, means literally “reclined,” according to the custom of the country. It is important to note this, in order to understand the remaining part of the passage.

- 37.—[*And behold a woman in the city.*] The questions, who this woman was, and at what time in our Lord’s ministry the transactions here described took place, have occasioned much discussion, and called forth much variety of opinion among commentators. On one point only almost all are agreed: She had been a notorious sinner against the seventh commandment.

The Romish writers, Maldonatus and Cornelius á Lapide maintain strongly that this woman was Mary Magdalene, and that the anointing here recorded is the same as that which took place at Bethany, and is described by Matthew, Mark, and John. Both these opinions seem untenable.

There is not the slightest evidence in Scripture that the “woman who was a sinner” was Mary Magdalene. Chemnitius says there is no authority for the opinion but tradition, and that this tradition began with Gregory the First, and was unsupported by the earlier fathers, Chrysostom, Origen, Ambrose, and Jerome.—There is no evidence that Mary Magdalene was the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and lived at Bethany.—Above all, there is not the least proof in Scripture that Mary Magdalene had ever been “a woman that was a sinner” against the seventh commandment.

On the other hand, there is strong internal evidence that the event here recorded by St. Luke, took place at an entirely different time and place from that recorded by Matthew, Mark, and John. Granting that St. Luke does not always relate events in regular chronological order, it seems asking too much to suppose that an event which all the other evangelists agree in placing at the end of our Lord’s life on earth, should be so entirely dragged out of its place by St. Luke as to be brought in at this early period of His ministry.—Moreover, the

expressions which St. Luke reports in this passage, appear very unlikely to have been used at the end of our Lord's ministry, and at the house of friends in Bethany. The question, "who is this that forgiveth sins also?" sounds like a question that would be asked at a comparatively early period of his ministry, and not like one that men would ask at the end of three years, and just before His death.

The true account I believe to be, that the events here recorded by St. Luke are entirely distinct from those recorded by Matthew, Mark, and John, and that the woman here mentioned is one whose name is, for wise and kind reasons, withheld from the Church. This is the view maintained by the great majority of all Protestant commentators.

It is a curious fact, that John Bunyan, in his famous sermon called "The Jerusalem sinner saved," maintains the strange view that the woman here described by St. Luke was Mary the sister of Martha, though he confesses that he got the picturesque story he founds on it, from a book which he saw twenty-four years before. For once the good man seems to have made a mistake.

[*Which was a sinner.*] It is a common remark, that the Greek words so translated, mean "which used to be, in time past, a sinner." I confess it appears to me doubtful, whether the Greek word for "was," will bear so strong a meaning. How lately this woman had been living in sin, we do not know, but it is highly probable, almost up to the very day when the events here related took place. In short, she "was" even then, by common report, a sinner. But it is evident that she had already repented of her sin, and was already ashamed of it, and this in consequence of our Lord Jesus Christ's teaching and preaching.—If this was not so there would be no meaning in the fact that "when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house," she brought her box of ointment, and anointed Him. In short, however recent her conversion, she came to the Pharisee's house a penitent and a believer.

[*Sat at meat*] The Greek word here, differs from the one in the preceding verse. It means literally, "is lying down at meat."

38—[*Stood at his feet behind him.*] To understand this we must remember that in the country where our Lord Jesus ministered, people did not sit down at meals, as we do in modern times, but reclined, or lay at full length on couches, with their feet stretched out behind them. It would thus be easy for this woman to do what she did to our Lord's feet.

In addition to this, we must remember that houses in the hot climate, where our Lord was, were very different from houses among ourselves. It was common to have large openings down to the floor, and almost to live, as it were, under a veranda, for the sake of coolness. This necessarily entailed great publicity in the entertainment given, and accounts for the ease with which this woman seems to have found her way into the place where our Lord was.

[*Anointed them.*] Ointments and oils were used in eastern countries, to an extent we can hardly understand. The excessive heat of the climate made it almost necessary, to preserve the skin from cracking. See Psalm civ. 15.

39—[*This man.*] There is probably something contemptuous and scornful in this expression. It is much the same as "this fellow," like Acts xviii. 13.

[*Would have known.*] Burgon remarks, "The discernment of spirits was accounted the mark of a true prophet; and such knowledge was recognized as the very note of Messiah, as the confession of Nathanael, and the woman of Samaria show." Messiah was to be "of quick understanding." See Isai. xi. 3, 4. John i. 49, and iv. 29.

40.—[*Jesus answering said.*] This expression shows the divine knowledge of hearts and thoughts which our Lord possessed. He taught Simon that He not only knew who the woman behind Him was, but that He also knew what was going on in Simon's mind. He was "a

prophet,” and in the highest sense.

42.—[*He frankly forgave them both.*] Let us observe that the debt was not forgiven because the debtors loved their creditor, but out of free grace, mercy and compassion. And the love of the debtors was the consequence of their debts being forgiven. A right understanding of this, is the clue to the whole passage.

47.—[*Her sins,...are forgiven; for she loved much.*] To explain these words as meaning that the woman’s sins were forgiven, *because* she loved much, is to contradict flatly the whole lesson of the six preceding verses. “For” must be taken as “wherefore,” and, according to Pearce and Hammond, may fairly be so taken. Our Lord’s meaning must manifestly be: “Her love is a proof of her forgiveness. She is a person whose many sins are forgiven.

The proof of it is, that she shows much love, and the lesson of my parable, according to thine own confession, is this, that much forgiveness produces much love.”—Even Stella, the Spanish Commentator, Roman Catholic as he is, allows that this is the true sense of the passage.

Lightfoot remarks, that our Lord does not say, “She hath washed my feet and anointed them, and therefore her sins are forgiven,” out, “therefore *I say* unto thee,” or “for this cause *I declare* unto thee that her sins are forgiven.” Her sins were forgiven before, but now, after this love that she has shown, I publicly declare unto thee her forgiveness.

48.—[*Thy sins are forgiven.*] We are not, of course, to suppose that these words mean that the woman’s sins were now forgiven for the first time. Such an interpretation would overthrow again all the doctrine of the story of the two debtors. The woman was really forgiven *before* she came to Christ. But she now received a public and authoritative declaration of it before many witnesses, as a reward for her open expression of love and gratitude. Before, she had hope through grace. Now, she received the assurance of hope.

49.—[*Who is this that forgiveth sins?*] Let it be noted once more, that this expression is the language that would naturally be used by persons who were strangers to our Lord, and heard and saw Him for the first time. It is exceedingly unlikely that such an expression would have been used at Bethany, a few days before His crucifixion, in the company of Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus.

50.—[*Thy faith hath saved thee.*] Let it be observed, that it is not said, “thy love hath saved thee.” Here, as in every other part of the New Testament, faith is put forward as the key to salvation. By faith, the woman received our Lord’s invitation, “come unto me and I will give you rest.” By faith, she embraced that invitation, and embracing it, cast off the sins under which she had been so long labouring and heavy-laden. By faith, she boldly came to the Pharisee’s house, and confessed by her conduct that she had found rest in Christ. Her faith worked by love, and bore precious fruit. But it was not love but *faith* that saved her soul.

[*Go in peace.*] This was a phrase which was a common valediction among the Jews, like our “goodbye” or “God be with you.” Pool thinks that our Lord specially referred to that “peace” which is the fruit of faith, described in Rom. v. 1. He paraphrases the expression thus: “Go thy way, a blessed and happy woman, and in the view and sense of thine own blessedness, be not troubled at the censures and reflections of supercilious persons, who may despise and overlook thee because thou hast been a great sinner ”