

THE WOMAN WHICH WAS A SINNER

NO. 801

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BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“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, 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.”
Luke 7:37-38.

THIS is the woman who has been confused 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, [#792, *Mary Magdalene*, January 26, 1868] 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 identified her. Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, did anoint our Savior, 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 Savior’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 *200* who did so, for the anointing of the feet of an honored 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 more often 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—remember that the one was Simon the Pharisee, and the other Simon the *leper*—and that Simon is one of the most common of Jewish names. In our day 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 among 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 confuse these two occurrences, you not only make an flagrant 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 Divine 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 before 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 favors 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, but she is not less *loving*, for if there are 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, "Your sins are forgiven," for she already possessed that priceless gift! Our Lord, instead of merely defending, warmly eulogized her love, and declared, "Wherever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman has 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 confused 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.

But 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 savory 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.

I. 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 honorable woman among its courtiers!

1. First, Grace is here glorified in its object. She was "a sinner"—a sinner not in the flippant, unmeaning, everyday 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 500-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 Savior 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 receives sinners and eats with them."

Free Grace has made no distinction among men on account of merit, whether false or real, if real there is. 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 whomever 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 you, if your heart bewails your sin—let this give you 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 so 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 You, who has discerning love,
Should give that gift to me?
How many hearts You might have had
More innocent than mine!
How many souls more worthy far
Of that pure touch of Yours!
Ah, Grace! Into unlikeliest hearts
It is Your boast to come;
The glory of Your 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 Divine choice 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 Brothers and Sisters, 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 could You have chosen *me*? What am I, and what is my father's house, that I should be taken into such royal favor?" 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 discourse 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!

2. 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 honor to the King of kings?—one of Christ's most favored servitors? She offered hospitalities to Jesus which the Pharisee omitted, and offered them in an infinitely better spirit and style than the Pharisee could have done if he had tried!

Let us remark that the Grace of God brought this woman in a way of Providence to listen to the Savior'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 Savior'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 cheeks.

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—eager 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 worked 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 spoke as never man spoke 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 Savior 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 plentiful 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 with them. 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 pitcher 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 spoke not a word, but how eloquent were her actions! Better, even, than Psalms and hymns were these acts of devotion! Then she thought of that alabaster box containing perfumed oil with which, like most Eastern women, she was likely 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, Brothers and Sisters, we would prefer a single speechless lover of Jesus who acted as she did, to 10,000 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 Brothers 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 worked 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! Her lips which were doors of lascivious speech, now yielded 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 You as we see the rock smitten and the waters gushing. "He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow." Note the woman's humility. She had once possessed a brazen face and knew no bashfulness, but now she stands *behind* the Savior. 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 honor. Those who truly serve the Lord Jesus have a holy bashfulness, a shrinking sense of their own unworthiness and are content to fulfill the very lowest office in His household.

That is no service for Christ when you would need ride the king's horse, and wear the king's garment and have it said, "This is the man whom the king delights to honor." That is serving *yourself* rather than Christ when you covet the chief place in the synagogue, and would have men call you Rabbi. But that is *real* service when you can care for the poor. When you can 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 cumin. They said, by every gesture, "Stand by, I am holier than you." 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 Divine Grace moves them to love, and love prompts them to courage? Yes, 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—let them all speak of what Divine 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 honored, and it is so more especially in this respect, that what she did was *practical*. Hers was not pretense, 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! Yes, 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, but 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.

3. 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—He permitted her the fond familiarity of kissing His feet again and again and to bedew them with her tears—He 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 you are! See, Believer, Jesus has heard your prayers and answered them! He has blessed your labors, given you souls as your reward, and at this moment that which is in your heart to do for Him He receives, and He raises no objection, but takes what you bring to Him—takes it with joy! O Grace, you are Grace, indeed, when the offerings of unworthy ones become dear unto Jesus' heart.

4. Further, Divine 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 mockery. 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 wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.”

Would to God men would give up their rebellious questions and bow before the King of kings! On this occasion, Simon quibbled 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 accuses 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-worked virtues of His chosen ones to be unveiled—and all eyes shall see that Grace reigns through righteousness! Then shall they forever 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—and 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 Divine 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, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink.” Grace does not smuggle men into Heaven, but brings them up to Heaven’s requirements through the Spirit and the blood!

5. Once more, my Brethren, the Grace of God is seen in this narrative in the bestowal of yet richer favors. 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, “Your sins are forgiven you.” From that moment full assurance of faith must have occupied her soul.

And then He gave her that choice benediction, “Go in peace,” by which the peace of God which passes 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 yet know the exceeding bounty of your own heavenly Father! 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 passes knowledge. Here, then, was Grace in its object, Grace in its fruit, Grace in the acceptance of that fruit, Grace in the defense which Jesus made of the gracious one and Grace in the blessings bestowed upon her. May Grace deal thus bountifully with us.

II. 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 turtledoves 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 wellhead of Divine 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 Spirit, Himself, kindles. If you truly love the God who made you and redeemed you, you may be well assured that you are His child, for none but His children have any love to Him.

Its secondary cause is faith. The 50th verse tells us, “Your faith has saved you.” Our souls do not *begin* with loving Christ, but the first lesson is to *trust* Him. Many penitents attempt this difficult task—they aspire to reach the top of the stairs without treading the steps. They want to be at the pinnacle of the temple before they have crossed the threshold. First, *trust* Christ for the *pardon* of your sin—when you have done this, your sins are forgiven—and *then* love shall flash to your heart as the result of gratitude for what the Redeemer has done for you. 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 cold-hearted creatures as we are. We are perfectly monstrous in our lack 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 Sunday school class, if you teach your children for Christ! How much better will you go forth this evening to tell 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, Brothers and Sisters, 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 *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 ablaze 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! 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 fervor, 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 is 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 quibble—well, perhaps it may keep his tongue from other mischief—let him—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 Divine 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 at all.

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 favored servant of this blessed Master. May the Lord give every one of you His blessing, for Jesus’ sake.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.