

CHRIST RECEIVING SINNERS

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A SERMON

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“And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.”

Matthew 9:10.

HOW strangely different was our Lord Jesus Christ from the philosophers of Greece! They were reserved in their demeanor; eclectic, or studiously choice, in their tastes; and jealous of contact with their fellow creatures. Retiring from the busy haunts of men, to encircle themselves with an atmosphere created by their own breath, they wanted none in their society but those who were fit companions for men so exalted in wisdom. Their disciples looked up to them with profound and insincere reverence; and they themselves, in their various halls and classrooms, talked as men might who were teaching little children, and their pupils were completely subject to their dictation; but they always kept “the common people” at a distance, for they concerned not themselves to instruct the many, but only to teach the few who were ambitious to become wise like themselves.

Our blessed Lord and Master was no philosopher of this sort, shut up with His few disciples by themselves. He had His chosen twelve, but He and they mingled freely with the populace. He was a man among men, and not a philosopher among those shut out from men. True, He taught greater wisdom than all the sages knew, and better philosophy than all the wise men of Greece understood; but, still, He was familiar with the people, tender-hearted, mild, and of a gentle spirit. We have an instance of this here, where we read of Jesus doing what Solon or Socrates would never have done; for He sat down to take a meal with the common people round about Him, eating with publicans and sinners.

How different, moreover, we may add, was Christ from the great prophets of the olden time! With the utmost stretch of imagination, you cannot conceive of Moses sitting down to eat with sinners. He was a king in Jeshurun; an awful majesty surrounded the prophet of Horeb, who was mighty in word and deed. Wherever he went, he appeared as the man whom his high office had exalted above his fellows. His whole character, like his face on that memorable occasion, when he had been in the mountain with God, shone so brilliantly that ordinary men could scarcely gaze upon him unless he covered his face with a veil. More than once, he was hidden in complete seclusion with God. True, he was accessible enough, in the due exercise of his office, to all who had complaints or charges to be decided at the bar where he presided as judge; but who would presume to think of being a companion to the mighty Moses? Even his brother Aaron and his sister Miriam seem to have had a great gulf fixed between them and their truly regal brother; they could not approach him without becoming deference, nor could he come down to be on a social level with them.

Think also of Elijah, the very pattern and model of a prophet of the Most High God. How high he towered above the men of his age! The fire, which Elijah called from heaven upon the Carmel sacrifice, and upon the captains of fifties and their fifties, seemed to be a fitting type of his own character. One can admire him as a prophet, and follow him as a leader, but who could think of having him as a companion and friend? Stern, unflinching, faithful, he has little or no pity for the sinner; the only thing that an erring man could say to Elijah would be what Ahab said to him, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” His sternness in rebuking sin, his bold, thundering denunciation of idolatry, made men tremble before him;

and we can hardly imagine that publicans and sinners would have been anxious to sit down to eat with him.

But my, brethren, the Christ whose gospel we preach, is no unapproachable philosopher. The glory of His person reflects even a brighter luster than the dignity of His office. He appeared among men, not as one who had been lifted up from the ranks to obtain a position for Himself, but as one who bowed Himself down from the heaven of heavens that He might bring blessings to the sons of men; yet the ignorant and the illiterate may find in Him their best Friend. He is no stern law-giver, like Moses, who, wrapping around himself the robe of his own integrity, looks upon the transgressor simply with the eye of justice; neither is He merely the pitiless denouncer of iniquity and crime, or the bold enunciator of penalty and punishment. Christ is the gentle Lover of our souls; the good Shepherd, coming forth, not so much to slay the wolf as to save the sheep. As a nurse tenderly watches over the child committed to her charge, so does Jesus watch over the souls of men; and like as a father pities his children, so does He pity sinful men. He does not stand upon a lofty height, and bid sinners ascend to Him; but, coming down from the mountain, and mingling in social communion with them, He draws them to Himself by the magnetic force of His almighty love. “Jesus, the sinners’ Friend”—that is His true title, for that is what He really is. O Jesus, may we personally know You as our Friend just now! We are sinners; be You our Friend.

Before I come directly to the subject, I want to paint three pictures, in order to show you, by the force of contrast, the way in which Christ, *the* Physician of souls, really cures and heals. There have been various schemes for cleansing society from the pollution that comes through sin. Even men, who were themselves sinners, have been conscious that iniquity so saps and undermines the foundations of society that it must, if possible, be uprooted and destroyed. Behold the many schemes which men have devised for this purpose; listen to the voices which have charmed men’s ears, and awed their hearts, but have not been able to change for the better their condition.

First came *Severity*, and he said, “There is a plague broken out among the people; clear out the tainted ones. There are the fatal spots upon their brows, the venom of the dread disease has worked its way to their skin, there is no doubt about their being infected; therefore, smite them, slay them, let them be destroyed. Take them away, executioner; it is better that they should be put to death than that the whole nation should perish. Cut off the few sickly sheep lest the whole flock should be affected.” But the Savior came, and He said, “No, no, not so; wherefore will you destroy them? If you do so, the disease will be spread all the more, for their blood shall be spattered on the men who slay them, and shall infect their executioners; and they, in their turn, will come back, and infect the man who condemned the plague-stricken to be slain; and here, in the very hall of judgment, the signs of the dread disease shall be seen even upon the judge’s brow. Wherefore deal you thus hardly with your brethren? You are all diseased; there is a plague upon every one of you. If you thus begin to uproot some of the tares, you may not only uproot the wheat, but you may uproot the whole field, which, after all, might bring forth something which would be better than absolute sterility. No, spare them; spare them; let them not die; give them into My hands.” His request was, of course, granted, and He went to those whom He had rescued, and He said, “Your forfeited lives are spared. It is well known that according to the laws of your fellow men, you deserve to die; but I have undertaken that, without the violation of law, you shall escape” Then He touched them, and healed their running sores, and said to all who stood near, “Now these men shall spread life through your ranks, for I have restored them from their sickness; and now, instead of being to you well-springs of everything that is abominable and filthy, they shall become fountains of everything that is lovely, and pure, and of good repute.” Glory be unto You, O Jesus; glory be unto You, for You have done far more than *Severity* could ever have accomplished!

Next came one called *Stern Morality*, and he said, “Let us not kill them; let not the laws be like those of Draco, written in blood; but let us build a lazar-house, with high walls, and let us thrust them in there, and shut them out from all contact with their kind; in this way they shall live, but shall do no injury to their fellows. And the self-righteous Pharisee said, “Let my house be far away from the infected spot, lest the wind should blow from them to me. Let them be shut away from their fellows, as persons under a curse; let not others speak to them, or go near them.” The Pharisees were practicing that method in Christ’s day. They had tabooed the publicans and sinners, saying to them, “We will not touch you with so much

as one of our fingers.” They drew their garments around them, and gave the moral lepers plenty of passage room in the streets; and if, by any chance, they did come into contact with them, or were obliged to have any dealings with them in the marketplace, they were careful to wash before they ate bread, lest they should be defiled. So society decided that a lazar-house should be built, and that the infected sinners should be put in there to rot and die by themselves. But Jesus said, “Not so, not so; if you mean to shut up all the infected, every one of you must also be shut up, for you are all suffering from the same disease in a greater or less degree. Why shut up these few when all are affected? You do not well; if you build the walls of the lazar-house as high as heaven, the festering disease within will still find an outlet, and taint your sons and your daughters, notwithstanding all that you do; and that place will be the hotbed of everything that is foul and noxious, and will tend to your own destruction despite all your efforts to be removed from it.” You know how, even to this day, a certain class of sinner is considered by some good, reputable people as being unworthy even to be spoken of, or noticed, and some are foolish enough to try to forget that they are actually in existence. But our Divine Master went to the gate of the lazar-house, and knocked; and when it was opened, He said to those within, “You may come forth.” Society outside objected; so He said, “Well then, if they may not come out, I will go in with them.” And to those inside, He said, “Shut the door, and keep out the over-righteous. I am come to eat bread, and to dwell with you, the infected and sinful ones.” He put out both His hands, and touched them, and healed their diseases, and the blood leaped again in their veins, and their flesh came to them again like the flesh of a little child. Then He opened the gate again, and, strange to say, society outside was infected this time, and He said to them who had once been lepers in the lazar-house, “Go you forth, and heal them;” and they went forth to carry healing to those who formerly thought themselves to be well, and thus He made the very curse itself to be a channel through which to spread the blessing. Blessed be You, O Jesus! You have done for sinners what the sternest laws and the strictest customs of society could never have effected.

But there have been others of a gentler spirit—*Philanthropists*—who have been sensible of the claims of humanity upon them. They have said, “Let us look at the case of these rebellious sinners in the most favorable light possible. Let us consider them as hopeful; let us use remedies that will be the means of healing them, but let us keep them in quarantine for many a day before we let them out; let us fumigate them, and put their clothes out until every trace of infection has gone from them; and if, after a long probation, they are proved to be really healed and cleansed, then let them go forth to freedom.” But Jesus said, “No, not so; why would you keep them thus shut up by themselves? If one of them should become better, contact with his fellows would make him sick again. Will you deny them your help and your sympathy, and shut them away by themselves? Your quarantine arrangements will breed further disease, and all your fumigations will be in vain; for, while you are seeking to cure, you will be generating the very disease you seek to destroy. The only effective remedy is for Me to go in with them where they are.” So He presented Himself before them; they were covered with running sores, and they themselves were most obnoxious; yet He touched them—no, more, He embraced them. They were filthy, but He took them in His own hands, and washed them. They were ragged, but He Himself took off their rags, clothed them in the spotless robe of His own righteousness, and gave them the kiss of His love upon their sin-stained cheeks. “Oh!” they said, “this is healing indeed. We were never healed before. People told us to get well, and said that, then, they would do something for us. They told us to cleanse ourselves, and said that, then, they would receive us; but You, O blessed Savior, did take us just as we were—all black, and defiled, and loathsome—and You have made us clean.” Glory be unto You, O Jesus, for You have done ten thousand times more for poor lost souls than Philanthropy ever even suggested! Your wisdom has availed where our prudence has defeated its own ends. Our sympathy has been marred by our vanity; our counsels have been rendered valueless by our conceit. We have repelled the confidence of sinners, while You have won their hearts; for You have sat down to eat with them, and Your disciples have shared the feast.

I have thus tried to paint three pictures; I do not know whether I have held the brush steadily enough, or have had sufficiently good colors to paint them true to life. I only want to show you that while we are condemning the outcasts, Jesus Christ comes forth, and saves them; while we are trying to keep sinners away from us, He goes to them, and heals them; and while we are hoping the best concerning them, and thinking of the means by which they can be gradually renovated, He goes to them, and restores them.

Christ takes into His arms some whom we would not touch with a pair of tongs. He receives into His very heart some whose names we would hardly venture to mention. He lifts up the beggar from the dunghill, He raises the despairing from the Slough of Despond, He takes the vilest of the vile, transforms them by His grace, and makes them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

I. After so long an introduction, I must compress the rest of my discourse as much as I can; and, first, I am going to ILLUSTRATE THE WAY IN WHICH CHRIST RECEIVES SINNERS.

There was a man—a tax-gatherer—who had an ill name everywhere; no one was more obnoxious than he was to the proud, moral, orthodox Pharisees. One day, he heard that Jesus of Nazareth, the great Prophet and Miracle-worker, was about to pass through his native place—the accursed city of Jericho; and having a great curiosity, and nothing but a curiosity, to see this mighty Savior—thinking, doubtless, no better of Him than that He was a strange enthusiast—he climbed up a tree, in the hope that, concealed amid its leaves, he might look down, unobserved, upon the famous Stranger. If a Pharisee had been walking that way, he would have avoided even the shadow of that tree, lest sin should be hidden by its shade, and he should thereby be defiled. But Christ, whose instincts of mercy always make Him sharp-sighted where there is an objective for His compassion, came right underneath that tree, and, looking up, cried aloud, “Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at your house.” No wonder that the Pharisees and the people in general, murmured because Christ went to be a guest with a man who was “a sinner” in a very special sense. They were surprised that a man in such ill repute should have the honor of entertaining the Lord Jesus Christ. But our Lord entered the house of Zacchaeus, and His truth entered the heart of Zacchaeus; and there, on the spot, that “sinner” became a saint, practically proving the reality of his conversion by saying to Jesus, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold;” and Jesus said to him, “This day is salvation come to this house.” O Savior, You have done right well! Suppose the Lord had passed by Zacchaeus without taking any notice of him, he would have remained as great a sinner as ever. Suppose He had upbraided him; possibly, then, the tax-gatherer would have replied in language not at all complimentary; but that kind word, that sweet look of pity, that gracious token of forgiveness broke the hard heart of the rich oppressor, and he gladly entertained his Savior, and became His disciple. This is the way in which Jesus still deals with sinners. Have we a sinner in this house—the house where Christ has, for many a day, worked miracles of mercy? Sinner, He will not despise you, and we are rejoiced to see you in the place where Christ is preached. His eye is on you now; where you are, I cannot tell, but He can; and it may be that this very hour, He will say to you, “Sinner, make haste, and come down, for tonight I must abide at your house.” Who can tell? It may be with you as it has been with many a score in this house—you may go home to forsake the drunkard’s cup, to leave the Sabbath-breaker’s haunts, to forsake the abodes of blasphemy, and to say, once for all, “Christ has called me; His I am, and Him I desire to serve.” This is how Jesus deals with sinners, even with sinners who are only moved by curiosity to see Him as Zacchaeus was.

On another occasion, Christ was by the seaside, and he passed a certain toll-house where a tax-gatherer was “sitting at the receipt of custom.” His name was Levi—at least, that was his name when he was at home; but now that he had become one of the hated publicans, he had taken the name of Matthew, just as many a young man, when he runs away from home, and enlists in the army or navy, takes a name which does not belong to him. Little did he think that when Jesus was passing by, He would take any notice of him; but He did, for He said to him, “Follow Me.” That was all He said, but there was a volume of meaning in those two words; and the glance of His eye, and the majesty with which He pronounced His divine command, produced instant and most willing obedience, for “he arose, and followed Him,” and Matthew the publican became Matthew the apostle and Matthew the evangelist. Now, if Christ needed an apostle, why did He not select one of the Pharisees? If He needed an evangelist, why did He not choose one of the scribes? The reason is that a publican and a sinner were more adapted to His purpose. Perhaps the Lord is, at this moment, looking for a valiant preacher of the truth; and it may be that you, my friend, away there among the crowd, are the man whom He has chosen for this high and noble enterprise. Christ found John Bunyan playing “tip-cat” on Elstow Green, and He found Richard Weaver down in the mines, blaspheming the name of God. Who knows whether He may not find you for this high purpose, to bless you,

and to make you a blessing? There may be some here, who will make hell's old pillars shake, though they are, today, the sworn friends of sin and Satan; but He, who has permitted them to go so far into sin, may issue His divine mandate, concerning each one of them—

“Almighty grace, arrest that man;”—

and he shall be renewed in heart, changed in life, and made to be “a new creature in Christ Jesus.” Certain it is that many of the most useful and honored servants of the Lord Jesus Christ have been taken from that very class with whom Jesus and His disciples ate bread. There was a certain person needed, on one occasion, to be—if I may use the term—lady-in-waiting to the King of kings. Queens might have been well content to part with their crowns in exchange for such an honor as that; yet “a woman in the city, who was a sinner,” was chosen to render this lowly service to the Lord Jesus Christ, and 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.” Simon, the Pharisee, found fault with Christ for allowing her to do this, but Jesus said it was her great love which had moved her to do what the Pharisee had neglected to do for his guest; and to the woman, Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven . . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” Am I addressing any woman who might truly take the term “sinner” to herself? My sister, this is how Christ received this woman who was a sinner. He accepted the homage of her love—love such as only she could render, love that could only come from a woman who had borne such a character as she had borne, and who therefore was filled with such intense gratitude to her Lord and Savior. This is how Christ receives sinners; oh, that He might thus receive you just now!

Here is another case in which Christ received a sinner. I have reminded you how He visited the house of a sinner, how He chose a sinner to be one of His apostles, and how He was anointed by a woman who was a sinner; now He was about to die and someone was needed to go with Him from earth to heaven. When He returned home, it was not meet that He should go back alone. The great Conqueror must not re-enter heaven without some token of His victories here below. O mighty Hero, You may not pass the gates of Your paternal metropolis without taking some captive with You! Who shall accompany the Savior into His glory? Shall it be some martyr, who, in fiery chariot, shall mount to heaven with his Redeemer? Shall it be some devout disciple and deacon, like Stephen, who, amid a shower of stones, shall see heaven opened unto him, and enter it side by side with his Lord? No; but there is a thief dying on the cross hard by the suffering Son of God, for Jesus was numbered with the transgressors, and died in the company of sinners even as He had lived among them. The thief prayed, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom;” and Jesus answered, “Today shall you be with Me in paradise;” and, probably the first soul to enter heaven after the return of the King was the soul of this poor penitent thief.

I will only mention one more case of Christ receiving a sinner. After He had gone back to heaven, He needed a man, who should be His apostle to the Gentiles. Peter, the Jew, was far too bigoted, even when his nature was overruled by grace—there was still so much of the Jewish exclusiveness in him—that he was not fit to be the apostle of the Gentiles. The Master, therefore, resolved that, for once, He would call out of heaven with an audible voice, and that, as a pattern for all who should afterwards believe on Him, He would have some one special soul. Who should that one be? You might send an officer through Greece and Rome, and he might find scores whom he would recommend for the post; but the least likely individual in the whole world was selected by Christ Himself. There he is, “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” for he hates Christ, and His followers as well. When Stephen was stoned, he gloated over the dying martyr. He is constantly casting the Christians, both men and women, into prison; and he is now on his way to Damascus, being exceedingly mad against the saints, that he may persecute all whom he can find there who are followers of Christ. The sequel of the story is given in Paul's own words to Agrippa, “At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying, in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecute you Me?” The further sequel is given in Paul's words to the church at Ephesus, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” This is my Master's way of dealing with sinners, even with him who called himself the chief. Proud professors, is this the way you deal with them? Professing Christians, whose hearts have grown

callous, is this the way you act towards poor sinful souls? And, O poor lost soul, is this the way that you thought Christ would deal with you? He will do with you as He did with them. He is as ready to save, today, as He was in the days gone by. He has as great a love for sinners now as He had when He went through the towns and villages of Galilee, teaching and healing the people, or when He poured out His soul unto death, that He might redeem the lost by purchasing them with His blood.

II. I now turn to my second point, and ask—HOW IS IT THAT CHRIST IS SO WILLING TO COME DOWN TO POOR SINNERS, AND SAVE THEM?

Do not imagine that it is because He is insensible to their guilt. Sinner, Jesus Christ knows far better than you do what an evil and bitter thing sin is. It is as hateful and loathsome to Him as anything can possibly be. It is not, therefore, because He is insensible to their guilt that He seeks the society of lost souls. Why, then, does He desire to be in their company?

It is *because He has such deep affection for sinners*. There is a little child crying upstairs; some people in the house wish that noise could be stopped, for they say they cannot endure it; but the mother says, “It is my child who is weeping up there,” and she hurries up to comfort and soothe her baby. So, when we hear the sinner blaspheme, we are angry with him; but Christ weeps over him, and comes forth to save him. “He is My child,” He says—

*“Joint heir with Me, he yet shall be
In glory everlasting.”*

There is all the difference between what a wife will do for her sick husband and what a stranger might do for him. Imagine the husband suffering from some loathsome disease. The nurse says, “No; for no money in the world will I stay any longer. Besides, the disease is infectious, and I might take it to my dear ones at home.” But if it were as infectious as the plague itself, and as noxious as the great pit into which the unconfined dead were cast, that wife would still remain with her loved one—if need be, to sicken, and suffer, and die—for she says, “He is my husband.” And here is a sinner, so full of filth that even the most sympathetic stand aside, and will not come near him; but the Lord Jesus sees, in that abject sinner, a fit objective for His pity and saving grace. “He is one with Me,” He says, “by eternal covenant and union, and I will stay with him till I have healed him; I will watch by him till I have saved him from all his filthiness and all his sin.”

Besides, poor sinner, there is another reason why the Lord Jesus Christ is so deeply interested in you. *He sees in you the purchase of His precious blood*. “I bought him,” He says, “with My heart’s blood; do you think that I will lose him after that?” “But, Lord, he blasphemeth You.” “Yes, but I have bought Him with My blood.” “But, Lord, he has made a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell.” “Yes,” says Christ, “I know he has; but I will disannul that covenant, and cancel that agreement, for I have bought him, and I will have him as My own.” Jesus never forgets the price He paid for the redemption of even one soul. I think I hear Him say, my brothers, “By My agony and bloody sweat, by My cross and passion, by My death and burial, I will have him as My own, for I cannot have suffered all these things in vain.”

Moreover, Christ *views the sinner, not as he is in himself, but as he is in the purpose of redemption*. “His whole head is sick,” says Christ, “but I can cure him; his whole heart is faint, but I can restore him and I will do it. His feet have gone astray, his mouth is an open sepulcher, his eyes are windows of lust, his hands are stained with blood; but I will amend all that, and make him a new creature, fit to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Jesus looks, you see, not so much to what the sinner is in himself, as to what He can make him. He sees, in every sinner, the possibility of making a glorified saint, who shall dwell with Him forever and ever. If He chose you, poor sinner, before all worlds were made, and bought you with His blood, He sees you not as you now are, but as you shall be when He has perfected you. Oh, what a wonder it will be when that poor drunkard, over there, shall sing in heaven as one of the spirits of just men made perfect, and when yonder harlot shall have a golden harp in her hand, and sound forth the praises of Him who has loved her, and washed her from her sins in His own blood! Yet He, who has said it, will do it; He, who is “mighty to save,” will redeem by power those whom He has secured by purchase. And, penitent sinner, Jesus already hears you hymning His praise; and He sees you, as you will be, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, washed in His blood, renewed by His Spirit, brought safely home, and glorified with Him forever. No wonder, then, that Christ is willing to come to poor sinners, and to dwell

with them. He can see what you and I cannot see—what they shall be when He has fulfilled His purposes of mercy and grace concerning them.

Sinner, you are so ashamed of your sin that you dare not approach a minister, but you can approach Christ. There is no pride in Him, and no cautious reserve, such as we might rightly exercise in dealing with you. Though you cannot tell even your own father all about yourself, you can tell it all to Jesus. You cannot tell all the story of your sin and your repentance to the wife of your bosom, but you can tell it to Jesus. There is no music that He loves so much as the voice of a sinner confessing his sin; there are no pearls that He prizes so highly as those pearly tears which repentance forms in the eye of the soul that trembles at His Word. Do not imagine that He is hard to please, for He loves sinners; do not fancy that it is difficult to obtain access to Him. Like the father in the parable, He can see a sinner when he is a great way off, and He will run to meet you, and give you a hearty reception, and a loving welcome. You will be happy in being saved, but He will be happier in saving you. You will rejoice in being pardoned, but He will rejoice more in pardoning you. I cannot put this blessed truth about Christ's compassion for sinners in such words as I gladly would do if I could. If you do not admit that you are a sinner, I have no gospel to preach to you; but if you stand self-condemned, I have a message of mercy to deliver to you. To the self-convicted, to the law-condemned, the prisoners that plead guilty, those who are ready to confess that they are undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving sinners, I have to say that Christ is an approachable Savior. No, more than that, He is waiting to be gracious; He stands, with arms outstretched, longing to clasp poor sinners to His heart. Why do you wait?

III. Now I close my discourse by endeavoring to teach you THE PRACTICAL LESSON WHICH OUGHT TO FOLLOW from the fact that Christ receives sinners, and eats with them.

Let me just utter a word of warning here. When we speak of Christ receiving sinners, everybody says, "Well, I am a sinner." It is a curious proof that people do not know what a sinner is, or they would not be so ready to admit that they are in that class. If I were to say to almost any man I met, "You are a criminal," in almost every case he would reply, "No, sir, I am not." But what is the difference between being a criminal and being a sinner, except that the sinner is the worse of the two? A criminal is a person who offends against the laws of men; "a sinner" is a theological term, signifying one who offends against the laws of God! People say, "To be criminals—oh, that is horrible! But to be sinners—well, we are all sinners;" and they do not appear to think anything of that terrible truth. Ah! but, unless the grace of God shall change you, the day will come when you will think it would have been better to have been a frog, a toad, a viper, or any other creature, rather than to have been a sinner; for, next to the word "devil," there is no word which has so much that is dreadful in it as that word "sinner." "A sinner" means one who cares nothing for God, one who breaks God's laws, despises God's mercy, and who will, if he continues as he is, have to endure God's wrath as a punishment for his sin.

Yet these are the persons whom Jesus Christ is willing to receive. You cannot, therefore, any of you, say, if you perish, that you perish because He would not receive you. "Oh, but!" you say, "He would never receive such a sinner as I am." How do you know that? Have you ever tried Him? There is not, even in hell itself, a sinner, who will ever dare to say that he came to Jesus, yet Jesus refused to receive him. There is not a lost soul, in the pit, who can look up to God, and truthfully say to Him, "Great God, I asked for mercy through the precious blood of Jesus, but You said, 'I will not grant it to you.'" No, that can never be; neither on earth, nor in hell, shall there ever be one soul that trusted in Christ and then perished. You say that Christ will not save you, so I ask again—Did you ever try Him? Did you ever give Him a fair trial? Did you ever, on your knees, conscious of your lost condition, say to Him, "Jesus, save me, or I die"? You are spiritually blind; did you ever say to Him, "Son of David, have mercy on me"? Did you cry to Him, again and again, and did He turn His back on you, and leave you in darkness? Leper, you are loathsome in His sight by reason of your sin; but did you ever say to Him, "Lord, if You will, You can make me clean"? No, you know you never did that, though you have often resolved that you would do so. Under an earnest sermon, you have said, "I will seek the Lord;" but when you got outside the house of prayer, some idle companion met you, and you soon forgot all about your good resolution.

But let me say to you now—Despite all the years in which you have heard the gospel in vain, if the Holy Spirit shall move you even now to confess your sin to Jesus, and to say to Him, "Son of David, have

mercy on me; I put my soul's affairs into Your hands from this moment"—sinner, He will save you. Or, if He will not, then I will perish with you, and the whole Church of God will also perish with you; for this is all our hope, that Jesus died to save the lost; and if one soul, believably gazing upon His wounds, can perish, then all must perish, and the pit must engulf the whole blood-bought family of God. But that can never be.

There is an old tradition, which I will repeat as a rebuke to the self-righteous, and a comfort to the sinner. Dean Trench, quoting from a Persian moralist, tells one of his old fables about Jesus. Of course, it is only a fable; but it contains the very spirit of truth about which I have been preaching. When Christ, according to this fable, was travelling through a certain region, He stayed at the cave of a hermit. It so happened that there was, living in the neighboring town, a young man whose vices were so great that, according to common report, the devil himself did not dare to associate with him lest he should become worse than he was before. This young man, hearing that the Savior, who could pardon sin, was in the hermit's cave, went to Him. Falling down on his knees, he made confession of his guilt, and acknowledged that he was utterly unworthy of mercy, but he entreated Christ, in the love of His gracious heart, to forgive him for the past, and make him a new man for the future. The monk, who lived in the cave, said to the young man, "Get you gone; you are not worthy to be in such a holy spot as this;" and, turning to the Savior, he said, "Lord, in the other world, appoint me a place as far away as possible from this wretch." The Savior answered, "Your prayer is heard; you are self-righteous, so I appoint you your place in hell; this man is penitent, and seeks mercy at My hands; I appoint him his place in heaven. Thus both of you shall have your heart's desire." There is the very essence of the doctrine of justification by faith in that old fable. Go you, who trust in your own good works, and perish. Come, you who confess your evil deeds, hate them, flee from them, and trust in Jesus, and you are saved, while they who go about to establish their own righteousness shall perish everlastingly. Oh, that my Master would draw some of you to Him at this moment! What do you say? Will you go with this Man, who receives sinners? He bids you come to Him; will you come? You cannot plead that you are too vile, for He takes the very off-scouring of men—the devil's outcasts, He will not cast out if they will but come to Him. However despairing of yourself you may be, you must not say of Him, "He will reject me." Trust Him to receive you, and trust Him now. O Spirit of the living God, prove the divinity of Christ's gospel, this very hour, by turning lions into lambs, and ravens into doves, and let the chief of sinners prove Your power to save! Amen.

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