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*“And it came to pass, as He spoke these things, a certain woman from the crowd lifted up her voice, and said to Him, Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You. But He said, More than that, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”
Luke 11:27, 28. (NKJV)*

Was this a loving-hearted woman who had been moved by the dear Savior’s discourse? Many, doubtless, had listened to the same gracious words—some of them with wrath, and others with stern complacency—but it may be that her soul began to swell with holy wonder at the marvelous things which proceeded out of His mouth, and her soul felt such an affection for the man from whom so much of grace proceeded that she cried, “Blessed is the womb that bore You!” Was it so? Perhaps it was an ignorant but passionate love breaking through all restraint. Sometimes, among our Primitive Methodist friends, we hear the same kind of thing—they get so carried away by the power of the truth which has just been stated that they cannot refrain from crying out, “Glory!” or, “Hallelujah!” Throughout all Wales, this custom, which I am far from condemning, prevails through the whole sermon, often very much to the comfort of the speaker, enlivening him, and cheering him on—and making him rise to greater flights than otherwise he might have taken. Perhaps we may look at this interruption of the affectionate woman in that light.

Possibly, however, there was bold, blank ignorance rather than intense affection. Hers may have been a sort of vacant wonder at what she had heard, and, involuntarily, she betrayed it with her tongue. So have I noticed, sometimes, when I have been preaching the Word among our Primitive Methodist friends that they have not always put the “Glory!” in at the right place, or the observation with which they have favored us has been as inappropriate as it well could be! Though I have been glad, at times, to hear some emotional response when it seemed to come from true sensibility, and was compatible with common sense, I have not been quite so gratified when ignorance has been the prompter. Perhaps it was so with this woman. Such, at least, is the opinion of many sound expositors—and Jesus does not appear to commend her at all. She was a poor ignorant soul who, perhaps, had never listened to any preaching before—and certainly had never listened to such preaching as that of Jesus Christ—and so she cried out, in a sort of stupid wonder, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You.”

Anyhow, whichever it might be, this woman was but a specimen of very many in her own age, and a representative of many millions in successive ages. She turned her admiration, you perceive, from the person of Christ to the person of His mother. There was some sort of tendency of this kind on other occasions in Christ’s life—and he rebuked it as He did here—for, you will observe, though He says nothing disrespectful of His mother, yet He at once puts the extinguisher upon everything like blessing her as though she were so highly favored above all other believers in Himself. On the occasion of the marriage in Cana of Galilee, Jesus answered His mother—I will not say roughly—that was not possible for Him—but somewhat sternly when He said, “Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour is not yet come.” He purposely discouraged what He must have perceived was the natural tendency of people’s minds to reverence His mother unduly. And it does seem marvelous to any thinking man that after such words as these of my text, Mariolatry should have prevailed in the Church of Rome to so frightful an extent as it has done and as it still does! Why, for every prayer offered to Jesus Christ, I believe there are fifty, at the present moment, offered to the Virgin Mary. At all events, in the Romanist’s rosary, there are nine beads for the “Hail Mary” to every one for, “Our Father.”

Observe that she is to be held in profound respect, she is “blessed among women.” There should never come from the lips of any Christian a single word of disrespect to her—she was highly favored, she was a sort of a second Eve, as Eve brought forth sin, this woman, this second Eve, brought forth the Lord who is our salvation! She does stand in a very high position, but still, in no respect is she to be an object of worship! By no means is she to be lifted up, and extolled as though she were immaculately

conceived, and afterwards lived without sin, and was taken up, as the Papists declare, by a marvelous assumption into heaven—an assumption, indeed, on *their* part, and nothing better than an assumption, without any foundation whatever in fact! No, brothers and sisters, the Virgin Mary was a sinner, saved by grace, as you and I are! That Savior whom she brought forth, was a Savior to her as much as to us! She had to be washed from sin, both original and contracted, in the precious blood of her own Child, “the Son of the Highest.” Neither could she have entered heaven unless He had pronounced her absolution, and she had been, as we are, “accepted in the Beloved.” Yet I do not wonder that there was a tendency to exalt her unduly—however, I do marvel much that, after Christ has spoken so plainly, and so expressly, men should have had the impudence, and the devil should have had the audacity to delude millions of professing Christians into a worship of her, who is to be revered, *but never to be adored!*

If you look at the text, you will see that there is something very beautiful about it. This woman pronounced a benediction upon the Virgin Mary—Christ lifts that off, and puts it on all His people. She said, “Blessed is the woman who brought You forth.” “Yes,” said Jesus, “she is blessed, but (in the very same sense) they are blessed who hear the Word of God, and keep it.” Thus, my brothers and sisters, whatever blessings pertain to Mary, pertain to you, and pertain to me if we hear the Word of God and keep it! Whatever we may suppose to have been the mercies comprehended in Mary being so highly favored a person, those very same mercies are yours and mine if, hearing the Word of God, we truly keep it!

I. It is supposed by many, and very naturally, that it would have been a delightful thing to have been the mother of our Lord, BECAUSE THEN WE WOULD HAVE HAD THE HONOR OF THE CLOSEST ASSOCIATION WITH HIM.

To have seen that infant in His cradle, and nursed Him upon one’s knees. To have marked the ripening years of the Holy Child, to have observed His gracious words, His holy piety, His complete obedience to His parents. To have remained with Him the 30 years which, doubtless, Joseph and Mary spent with their honored, glorious Son, must have been no small blessing! The same spirit, you know, comes out in Mrs. Luke’s pretty hymn, such a favorite with our dear children, which we all of us love to sing—

*“I think, when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men—
How He called little children as lambs to His fold,
I should like to have been with them then.
I wish that His hands had been placed on my head,
That His arms had been thrown around me—
And that I might have seen His kind look when He said,
‘Let the little ones come unto Me.’”*

Yes, many a mother might feel that to be kissed with those little lips, to have had her neck surrounded by those blessed arms, to have had her eyes looked into with the love-flashing eyes of such a Child as that, would have been a gift to be craved for every day! Well, so it looks, beloved, and yet, if we come to think rightly of it, the illusion is quickly dispelled. It was a high privilege to be associated with Christ, but, unless spiritually sanctified, it was a solemn responsibility sinking the soul deeper in guilt, rather than raising it higher in sanctification! Let me venture to remind you of one who had the very closest intimacy with Christ in the days of His public ministry. He was so trusted by the Savior that he kept the little treasury in which Christ put, when there were any, the excessive gifts of charity. He was the treasurer of the little company—you know him—Judas. He had been with Jesus almost everywhere. He had been His familiar friend and acquaintance, and when He dipped the bread with Him in the bowl, it was but an indication of the close association which had been preserved between the Divine Master and a vile creature who was utterly unworthy of such a privilege! There was never such another “son of perdition” as Judas, the friend and acquaintance of Jesus Christ! Never has any other man sunk so low in the depths of divine wrath, with so huge a millstone about his neck, as this man with whom Christ took such sweet counsel, and went to the house of God in company! The same sun ripens the corn and the poppies. This man was ripened in guilt by the same external process that ripened others in holiness!

It is not, then, after all, so great a gift, looked at as a natural blessing. But, whatever the blessing may be, it is open to every Christian spiritually. Beloved you may have an acquaintance with Christ if you are His people! Quite as near, and far more enduring than any acquaintance which His mother could have gained by merely dandling Him on her knees, or supplying His needs from her breasts! Today you may talk with Jesus, you heirs of heaven! Your Divine Elder Brother’s company is free to you—you have but

to go to Him, and He will bring you into His banqueting house, and His banner over you shall be love. Still is His left hand under the head of His saints, and His right hand does embrace them. There are dearer things than ever the infant Christ could give to His mother! There are kisses of His lips sweeter, more spiritual than any which Mary received. You have but to long for them, and to pine after them, and when you get them, you have but to prize them, and you shall have them every day! I trust, beloved, some of us need not cry with the spouse in the Song, "O that you were as my brother that sucked the breasts of my mother! When I should find you without, I would kiss you," for we can say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His...Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am love-sick." I say, then, that all the honor of associating with Christ may be had, at the present moment, by His people! The sweetest of fellowship can be enjoyed by us in the highest and purest sense, so that the blessing which Mary had is ours, and we may say, with Christ, "Yes, rather blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it."

II. Again, it is naturally supposed, by some, that it must have been a sweet thing to be the mother of our Lord BECAUSE THEN WE WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH HIM, AND HAVE KNOWN MORE OF HIS HEART.

If He had any secrets, surely He would confide them to His mother! There must have oozed out, in His private life, some things which men did not see in public. Perhaps there may have been something which He could not very well unveil to the gaze of the millions which would be perceived by Joseph, and by His admiring mother. She was behind the scenes. She had the benefit of looking into His very heart in a way in which we cannot do. Well, there may be something in that, but I do not think there is much. I do not know that Mary knew more than others—what she did know, she did well to lay up in her heart—but she does not appear, from anything you read in the gospels, to have been a better instructed believer than any other of Christ's disciples. And we have no indication of her having made any extraordinary advances in the spiritual instruction which her Son had given.

But certain is it that, whatever Mary may have found out, you and I may find out now—not naturally, but spiritually. Do you wonder that I should say so? Here is a text to prove it—"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant." I remember also the Master's words where He said, "Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knows not what his lord does; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of My Father, I have made known unto you." No, so blessedly does this Divine Revealer of secrets tell us what is in His heart, that He keeps back nothing which is profitable to us—and can say to us as He said to His disciples—"If it were not so, I would have told you." Christ keeps nothing back from His chosen! Between the heart of a true saint and Christ, there are no secrets! We pour our hearts into His heart, and He pours back His heart into ours. Does He not, this day, manifest Himself unto us as He does not unto the world? You know that He does! And therefore you will not ignorantly cry out, as this woman did, "Blessed is the womb that bore You," but you will intelligently bless God that, having heard the Word, and kept it, you have, first of all, as true a communion with the Savior as the Virgin had, and you have, in the second place, as true an acquaintance with the secrets of His heart as she can be supposed to have obtained!

III. Further, perhaps a more common remark is this, "I wish that I had been Christ's mother, so that I MIGHT HAVE NURSED HIM, AND SUPPORTED HIS NEEDS, watched Him in His weakness, put Him to His rest, and heard the first lisps when He began to speak. Oh, it would have been something to have said, when I was in heaven, that I had nursed the One who is now exalted far above all principalities and powers, that I listened to the cry of His infancy, and relieved His needs."

Well, that would be something, but let me say to you that you may have it, beloved—every child of God may have it! Christ is still on earth—not as to His bodily person, but as to His mystical person—and you may still nurse that mystical person. We, ministers of God, are we not nursing fathers unto the Church of God? And you, each of you, in your sphere, as you teach the ignorant, guide the wandering, and comfort those that are bowed down, are hearing the plaintive cry of a suffering Savior! And you are, with the breast of your consolation, supplying the needs of His yet infant Church. Perhaps it is better, and far nobler, to have the honor of nursing Christ's mystical body than it was to care for His corporeal frame, because there is a much wider range here. It was but a little cup He needed. It was but a morsel, and a drop the Savior sometimes needed. But now His great body, stretched as it is from Japan to America—His great body, found as it is in every part of this world—His great body, found in yonder sick one, in yonder poverty-stricken ones, requires vastly more, and therefore of your substance you may give more, yes, your whole strength you may offer up, that you may feed Him and supply His spiritual

needs! Whatever honor, then, the Virgin had in this respect, Christ's pure virgins may still have if they will wait upon His Church and minister to it of their heart's substance—

*“Jesus, poorest of the poor
Man of sorrows! Child of grief!
Happy they whose bounteous store
Ministered to Your relief,
Jesus, though Your head is crowned,
Crowned with loftiest majesty,
In Your members You are found,
Plunged in deepest poverty.
They who feed Your sick and faint
For YOURSELF a banquet find!
They who clothe the naked saint
Round YOUR loins the raiment bind.”*

IV. It may be very possible that some others have looked at it in another way. They have said, “Blessed is the womb that bore Him, and the paps that gave Him suck, for had it been our lot to be His mother, then we believe HE WOULD HAVE BEEN READY TO HEAR OUR CRY, for a son cannot surely resist the prayer of His own mother. And when a mother says, ‘My Son, help me, I am sinful. I believe in You, help me. When she cries out to Him whom she had conceived, ‘Help me, blot out my sins,’ why surely Jesus would heed, with ready ear, and say, ‘Mother, your sins are forgiven you.’”

But, beloved, this is only our fancy, for Christ is just as ready to save *any* sinner in this place as He was to save His mother, for it is His greatest delight to see a sinner, with tears in his eyes, crying, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” If I had power to pardon you, I think you know how cheerfully I would do it. Oh, could I break your hearts, and bind them up again, God knows that I would not let this night pass without doing it! And do you think that my Lord and Master is less loving than I am? You feel, if He were here tonight, and you were His mother, that He would be sure to hear your cry and answer you. But Jesus Christ said, on one occasion, as He looked upon the crowd gathered together, when someone said to Him, “Your mother and Your brethren stand outside, desiring to speak with You”—what did He say? “Who is My mother? And who are My brethren?” And then He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, “Behold My mother and My brethren! For whoever shall do the will of My Father who is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.” And you, if you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall not stand second to His mother! No, shall I not say it? You shall even have the preference! Christ was preaching, and they said, “Here is your mother.” Did He stop to attend to His mother? No, but first He would feed His disciples! First He would teach them! And so, sinner, you shall not be second to the mother of the Savior! Do but cry to Him now! Oh, that the Holy Spirit might show you your lost state, reveal to you your need, and put a penitent cry into your mouth, for, when you can cry, “Jesus, pity me, and save me,” you may cry to Him with the greatest confidence, for—

*“He is able, He is willing,
Doubt no more!”*

You need not seek to move His heart with many cries, for His heart is moved already! He loves the sons of men. His delights are with them. You cannot do Him a greater service than by letting Him save you. Submit yourself, with all your emptiness, to the fullness of His unspeakable compassion! Is there not a thought here that might woo some—I am holding it now like a loadstone—is there no metal here that will be attracted by it? The love of Christ to His people, to poor sinners who seek Him, is as great as any love He ever had to His mother—and even greater! You may come with boldness to Him, though you never sought His face before!

V. Again, I think some have thought that if they had been His mother, THEY COULD HAVE COME TO HIM WITH GREATER EASE.

“It is so easy to speak to one whom we know. We are not at all afraid to tell our needs to one who has been so near to us as Christ was to His mother.” Yet I would have you remember that Christ, as the Son of God, was *not* the Son of Mary. Christ, the Divine Savior, was no nearer to Mary than He is to us! Christ was merely the man Christ that was conceived in her womb, or that sucked at her breasts, and, therefore, in His divine person, He towers as much above her as He does above us! And then, though He was born of the substance of His mother, yet was He of our substance, too, for He is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh—a man, such as we are! If He were an angel, being of a different kind, we might be afraid to come to Him, but He is a man! He has a man's emotions, a man's heart, a man's compassion, a man's love, and we need not be afraid to come to Him! What though He was not born of

us, yet is He of us! Though we are not His mother, yet, we are His brothers and sisters. So let us come boldly to Him! Sinner, you have as much right to come as Mary had. She had none except what grace gave her—you have the same! Did Christ ever cast away one sinner who came to Him? No. Did He ever reject one that was ever brought to Him? There was a woman taken in adultery, and she did not come willingly, but they brought her to Him, thinking, “Surely, Christ will condemn her.” What was the result? After driving all her adversaries away, He said to her, “Go, and sin no more.” And so will He say to you if your doubts, and trembling, and fears should bring you to Him. When He casts one soul away, then let other souls be afraid to come to Him, but while my blessed Master stands with open arms, and takes the foulest, and vilest, and poorest to minister unto His love, I pray you stand not back through shame or fear! As much as if you were His mother, and He your Child, come to Him, for He invites you to come, saying, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” With tearful eyes He entreats you to come to Him—and if you will not, He does but relieve His heart by crying, “How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you would not!”

VI. Perhaps, if you will think this over, you will see much more that is beautiful. I am sure there is no topic more consolatory than that which my text contains. **THE VERY BLESSING WHICH BELONGED TO THE VIRGIN MOTHER OF JESUS BELONGS TO EVERY SOUL THAT HEARS GOD’S WORD AND KEEPS IT!**

Now you hear it. Do you hear it with your inside ears—with the ears of your heart? And when you hear it, do you keep it in your memory? Do you keep it in your faith? Do you try to keep it in your obedience? And are you daily testifying to its truth? If so, all these blessings are yours, and let me say to any trembling, awakened, convicted sinner—all these blessings may be yours if you hear the Word of God and keep it tonight! Here are one or two words of God that I want you to keep—“Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Will you not come and reason with God, and talk this matter over? You have heard the Word; I pray you to keep it, that is, to *obey* it. Here is another message from the Word of God—“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” You have heard that—keep it! Believe that although you are a sinner, He came to save you! Rest in it, trust in it! Here is one more, and I pray you, as you hear it, keep it—“He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” You have heard it—now keep it. To believe is to trust. Trust Christ now! I pray God to compel you to do it before you pass those doors. Fall flat on your face upon Christ’s promise! As for your own righteousness, away with it to the dogs! No prayer, no tears, no vows, no sighs of yours can do anything in the matter! Trust Jesus Christ wholly, now!

And then if you have heard that Word and shall thus keep it, go your way, and let Satan say what he will, and let the flesh make what noise it pleases—Christ has blessed you, and you are blessed! He has said to you, sinners as you are, “Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.” When you and I get to heaven, may we find it to be so! May we glory there, and sing as loud a song as even Mary did when she said, “My soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden”—for all generations may call that one blessed who has sought and found the Savior! O beloved, even in heaven, that song of Mary shall make a sweet song for us all! May we begin to sing it here, and Christ shall have the praise! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

Luke 11:14-54.

Verses 14, 15. *And He was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spoke, and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casts out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils.* One would hardly have thought that they could have gone to such a length as that—but when men hate Christ, there is nothing they will not say against Him. It is no subject of surprise when great heresies arise, for they are the natural outcome of human enmity against Christ and His truth. People in such a state of heart will say anything. They will give utterance to thoughts that you could not have imagined would have entered any human brain—it is the enmity of the heart to Christ that produces this blasphemy of the tongue!

16. *And others, tempting Him, sought of Him a sign from heaven.* “You are working this work from beneath,” they said, “now do something that is really from above.” They must have known that the casting out of the devil was from heaven, for Satan would never cast out Satan!

17, 18. *But He, knowing their thought, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? Because you say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub.* That was a very good and sufficient answer to these cavilers. It is a comfort to us to know that any error is very vulnerable—there is always a weak point about it. In this case, Christ permitted it to turn its sting upon itself.

19. *And if I, by Beelzebub, cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore shall they be your judges.* For some of these men had sons who either did really cast out devils, being disciples of Christ, or else professed to do so, being exorcists, pretending to a power they did not possess. In either case, the argument was good as against the objectors.

20-22. *But if I, with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keeps his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he takes from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divides his spoils.* This is how Christ drives out the devil by sheer force of arms—He overcomes him, and drives him out. He does not cajole him, invite him, or persuade him to go, but He fights with him, puts forth His omnipotent power against him, overthrows him, takes away his armor, and divides the spoil. Were you ever conscious of such a fight as that? If not, be afraid of your so-called reformation, for there is no true reformation, and no true conversion in which there is no conflict between Christ and Satan!

23, 24. *He that is not with Me is against Me: and he that gathers not with Me scatters. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man.* This is the kind of “conversion” which is not genuine—“when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man”—“gone out” on his own accord—and he may do that. He may leave a man, for a while, with the evil purpose of getting him more completely into his power afterwards. “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man.”

24. *He walks through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, I will return unto my house from where I came out.* It was his house all the while! He left it voluntarily—he was not driven out by force—he simply left it for a time, in order that he might return to it, and retain it the more completely. Now he goes back to it.

25. *And when he comes, he finds it swept and garnished.* There has been a reformation of a sort—the man has given up drunkenness, left off swearing, and become, in certain respects, a better man. The house is swept and garnished, but there is no new tenant of Mansoul—there is no Christ come to take possession of Heart Castle.

26. *Then he goes, and takes to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.* It often happens that when men make a profession of reformation, and then relapse into their former state, they become far worse than they were before. The so-called “reformation” is all of their own doing—or rather, the greater part of it is the devil’s doing. The demon within the man voluntarily went away, and now that he is back, he brings with him “seven other spirits more wicked than himself.” And so the man is more than eight times worse than he was before the demon left him for a while!

27, 28. *And it came to pass, as He spoke these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said unto Him, blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You. But He said, more than that, blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.* The enthusiastic woman was so carried away with admiration for Christ, that she thought His mother was a highly-favored woman, and she called her, “blessed.” “Yes,” said Christ, “she is blessed, but still more blessed are they who have the Word of God in their hearts, who regard it as their own, and keep it as a great prize.”

29. *And when the people were gathered thick together, He began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign.* Look back to the 16th verse—“Others, tempting Him, sought of Him a sign from heaven.” Christ had answered those who imputed His miraculous works to Satanic agency—now He answers these others.

29, 30. *And there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.* Jonah rose, as it were, from the dead, for he was buried in the deep, in the belly of the whale! And Christ was buried in Joseph’s tomb, yet He came back from the grave on the third day.

31, 32. *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost part of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.* The resurrection would make Christ the most conspicuous sign of God's presence among the people! It would be the testimony of God to His Son that He was, indeed, the Messiah.

33-35. *No man, when he has lighted a candle, puts it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they that come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light, but when your eye is bad, your body is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in you is not darkness.* If your religion is irreligion, if your hope is a false one, if your highest aspirations are untrue, what is your position in the sight of God? Where are you?

36, 37. *May your whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle does give you light. And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee besought Him to dine with him: and He went in, and sat down to meat.* It was often a matter of marvel to the onlookers that Christ went among publicans and sinners—but is it not a greater wonder that He went among Pharisees? If they asked Him to their houses, it was usually because they hoped to entangle Him in His talk, yet the condescension of our Master is so great that again and again, “He went in, and sat down to meat.”

38. *And when the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not just washed before dinner.* Not because Christ's hands needed washing, but because it was the custom of the Pharisees to wash before eating, and our Lord broke through the customs as He was known to do, for He cared nothing for their inventions!

39, 40. *And the Lord said unto Him, Now do you Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. You fool, did not He who made the outside make the inside, also? “One needs washing as much as the other. You are so careful of your hands—will you not be more careful of your hearts?”*

41. *But rather give alms of such things as you have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.* “When you are full of love to your fellow men, and make a practice of helping them, you have cleansed your heart from selfishness and have really washed yourself.”

42. *But woe unto you, Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God; these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone.* How many, in these days, are very particular about very little things, but very careless about great things? They would not violate the law of their sect or party for the world, but the law of God is of small account to them.

43. *Woe unto you, Pharisees! For you love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.* They loved to be called Rabbi, Learned doctors of the law. Any title that made them appear great was very sweet to them.

44. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.* Nobody but Christ knew how base they were. They were fair to look upon, but He knew that they were villainously hypocritical, and He, therefore, denounced them. Ah, dear friends, the great matter is to have grace in the heart—to have the divine light within in the soul—but if we have not this, vain is a fair profession, vain is everything that comes from man! If we are to be saved, we must have the grace that comes from God alone.

45. *Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto Him, Master, thus saying you reproach us also.* There was no great difference between the scribes and Pharisees, and the lawyers, as this man evidently perceived, and as our Lord also soon confirmed by pronouncing upon them the same kind of, “Woe,” that He had pronounced upon the other false teachers!

46. *And He said, Woe unto you also, you lawyers! For you load men with burdens grievous to be borne, and you yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.* Their regulations as to moral and ceremonial observances were like huge bundles of firewood or crushing burdens bound together and made into a weight intolerable for any man to carry! Many of these rules, by themselves, were grievous enough—but all together they formed a yoke that neither the people nor their fathers could bear. The scribes, Pharisees, and lawyers piled the great load upon them—but none helped them to sustain it, nor

offered to relieve them of any portion of it. “You load men with burdens grievous to be borne, and you yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.”

47, 48. *Woe unto you! For you build the sepulchers of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and you build their sepulchers.* They pretended to have such regard for the holy men of the past that, being unable to honor them in person, they would set up monuments to their memory, and adorn their resting places with tokens of respect. Out of their own mouths our Lord condemned these hypocrites—“Truly you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers.” In effect, Jesus said to them, “You confess that you are the sons of the murderers of the prophets. That admission carries with it far more than you imagine. You are their sons, not only by birth, but also by resemblance—you are veritable children of those who killed the prophets. If you had lived in their day, you would have committed the crimes you pretend to condemn.”

49-51. *Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute, that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation. From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zachariah, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.* The destruction of Jerusalem was more terrible than anything that the world has ever witnessed, either before or since. Even Titus seemed to see in his cruel work the hand of an avenging God. Truly, the blood of the martyrs was amply avenged when the whole city became a veritable Aceldama, or field of blood. It was before that generation had passed away that Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed. There was a sufficient interval for the full proclamation of the gospel by the apostles and evangelists of the early Christian Church—and for the gathering out of those who recognized the crucified Christ as their true Messiah. Then came the awful ending which the Savior foresaw and foretold.

51. *Woe unto you, lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge: you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in, you hindered.* This “Woe” is similar to that pronounced upon the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, and it was a terrible charge to be brought against them by Him who could read their hearts, and who could truthfully say to them, “You have taken away the key of knowledge: you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in, you hindered.” They ought to have helped men into the kingdom. Instead of doing so, they hindered those who were entering. Are there not false teachers, nowadays, who put stumbling stones instead of steppingstones in the way of those who are entering the kingdom of heaven?

53, 54. *And as He said these things unto them, the scribes and Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently, and to provoke Him to speak of many things: laying wait for Him and seeking to catch something out of His mouth that they might accuse Him.* Thus they proved the truth of the accusations that He had brought against them! But all their plots and traps were in vain until the hour appointed for His great sacrifice to be offered on Calvary.

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