

OPEN HOUSE FOR ALL COMERS

NO. 665

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“This man receives sinners, and eats with them.”
Luke 15:2.

IT is not very unusual that the Pharisees could not understand the Savior’s mode of action—not only because self-righteousness and bigotry had blinded their eyes, and callousness of heart to the interest of others and had bound them up in the darkness of self-righteousness, but also because the Savior’s mode of acting was contrary to the general current of the dispensation to which the Pharisee had been accustomed. The dispensation of the old covenant was that of distance. When God appeared to His servant Moses, it was, “Draw not near here: take off your shoes.” And when He manifested Himself upon Mount Sinai to His own chosen and separated people, one of the first commands was, “You shall set bounds about the mount, and if so much as a beast touches the mountain it shall be stoned or thrust through with a dart.” In the sacred worship of the tabernacle and the temple, the thought of distance must always have been prominent to the devout mind. The mass of the people did not even enter the outer court. Into the inner court, none but the priests could ever dare to come; while into the innermost place, or the holy of holies, once a year, one person only ever entered. A thick costly veil hung before the manifestation of Jehovah’s presence, and upon the Shekinah, no mortal eye ever gazed, except that eye which, once a year, alone, dared to look upon its splendor through the mist of the smoking incense, when the blood of atonement was sprinkled on the mercy seat. The Lord seemed always to be saying to the whole of His people, with but a few exceptions, “Come not near here.” It was the dispensation of distance; as if the Lord, in those early ages, would teach man that sin was so utterly loathsome to Him, that He must treat men as lepers put outside the camp, and when He came nearest to them, yet He made them feel the width of the separation between a holy God and the impure sinner.

But Jesus Christ came on quite another footing. The word, “Go,” was now exchanged for, “Come,” and distance was made to give place to nearness; partitions were broken down, middle walls of separation became like tottering fences, and we, who sometime were afar off, were made near by the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, incarnate Deity has no wall of fire about it. Christ was surrounded with that divinity which does hedge about a king, but it was only as a hedge of thorns to Himself, and not as a hedge of briars to keep off the approach of the meanest of mankind. “Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”—that is the joyful proclamation of God as He appears in human flesh. Not now does He teach the leper his leprosy by setting him at a distance, but by suffering the penalty of man’s defilement; not now does He teach man that the disease is naturally incurable—He now shows him the heavenly cure by revealing the fact that God, without sully His purity, can come into contact with impurity in order to its removal, and without receiving contagion from the arch-leper, the devil, can grapple with him in the human heart, and lay hold upon His adversary that He may bind him hand and foot, and cast him away from men, no more to oppress our race. Jesus ushered in the dispensation of nearness, which, as you all know, is to be followed by one of greater nearness still, for, as God is very near to us spiritually, the day draws near—oh, hasten it, good Lord!—when the angels shall sing, “The tabernacle of God is with men and He does dwell among them.” When we shall need no temple in which Deity can be enshrined, for the Lord God and the Lamb shall be the temple of universal manhood, and we shall see Him face to face, and days of distance and of mourning shall be ended. I do not wonder, then, that Pharisees, who had drunk very deep into the separating spirit of the law, should have been perfectly astounded that a person, claiming to be the Messiah, and professing to be that Adonai who sits at the right hand of Jehovah till His enemies are made His footstool—should, as they thought, act so inconsistently with His own professions, and constantly allow a mob of the dross, and scum, and raff of

the population to be associated with Him! They, therefore, said, "This man receives sinners," and worse still, He breaks through all rules of caste, and all degrees of separateness, and makes Himself so familiar that He actually eats with them.

Now, this truth, which so startled them, has become very familiar to those of us who have been received and have eaten with Him; but still, the sinner, trembling under a sense of sin, feels the spirit of the old law like a black cloud hovering over him, and he can hardly venture to believe, much less to understand in all its richness of mercy, that Jesus still receives sinners. He fosters the notion that Jesus will look for some good thing in him, and demand at least some redeeming trait in character, some act of penitence, some holy resolution, something or other which may mitigate guilt, and conciliate regard; but the abstract truth of God that this man receives sinners as such and eats with them, needs to be proclaimed again, and again, and again, that the ears of unbelieving, mistrustful men may at last receive it—and that their hearts may feel its power. May God the Holy Spirit bless our attempt this morning, and His shall be the praise.

Now, first of all, *Jesus receiving sinners*; and secondly, *Jesus eating with them*.

I. First, then, JESUS RECEIVING SINNERS.

This was and is a great fact—our Lord received, and still receives sinners. He permits them *to form a part of His congregation, and even to draw near to hear Him*. A philosopher wrote over the door of his academy, "He who is not learned, let him not enter here." But Jesus speaks by Wisdom in the Proverbs, and says, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here: as for him who lacks understanding, let him eat of My bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled" (Prov 9:4, 5). He bids the simple come and learn at His feet. Moral teachers have always been choice in the selection of their followers, and have thought it a degradation, and a casting of pearls before swine, to throw their useful maxims, their invaluable dogmas as they dream them to be, before the vulgar herd, the sinful crowd. But this man receives sinners. Whatever other men may do, *this man*, this one, this one alone, if no other with Him, this one beyond all other teachers, however gentle and compassionate—this man receives sinners. He will speak and tell out His mysteries too, even when sinful ears are listening, for He receives sinners *as His disciples*, as well as His hearers. If they come casually into the throng, His eyes glance upon them, and He has a word of gentle rebuke and wooing love; but if they will come and join the class who cluster constantly about Him, they shall be thoroughly welcome, and the deeper and higher truths reserved for disciples shall be revealed to them, and they shall know the mystery of the kingdom of God. When He has cleansed sinners, He receives them not only as disciples, but as *companions*.

This man permits the guilty, the once profane, the lately debauched, and formerly dissolute, to associate themselves with Him, to wear His name, to sit in His house, to be written in the same Book of Life with Himself. He makes them here partakers with Him in His affliction, and hereafter, they shall be partakers with Him in His glory. This man receives pardoned sinners into companionship. No, more, He receives them *into friendship*. The head that leaned upon His bosom was a sinner's head, and those who sat at the table with Him, to whom He said, "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friends," were all of them, sinners, as they felt themselves to be. She who bore Him, she who ministered to Him of her substance, she who washed His feet with tears, she who was first at His empty sepulcher—all these were sinners, and some of them emphatically sinners. Into His heart's love He receives sinners, takes them from the dunghill, and wears them as jewels in His crown, plucks them as brands from the burning, and preserves them as precious monuments of His mercy; and none are so precious in His sight as the sinners for whom He died. When Jesus receives sinners, He has not some outside reception place where He charitably entertains them for a time, as great men may do passing beggars, but He opens the big golden gates of His own heart, and He takes the sinner right into Himself—yes, He admits the sinner into personal union with Himself, and makes the sinner a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. There was never such a reception as this. This fact is still the same—He is *still* receiving sinners.

This fact must not excite your unbelief because of its strangeness. I know the world, sinful as it is, does not receive sinners. When her character is gone, the fallen woman is pointed at in the streets, and no decent society will entertain her; but this man receives harlots when their good name and fame has long since become a thing of the past. When the man has played the rogue, and the prison has confined him, there are few among his fellows who will speak with or acknowledge him; but this man receives

thieves, for a dying thief went with Him into Paradise! Some men, who run well for a season, who suddenly fall from their high estate, are banished and excluded, proscribed and shut out; and I suppose, while society is what it is, this must always be the case—no, in Christ's Church discipline requires that the offender should be put forth from us; it is painful, but it must be done; but there is no "must" of this sort pressing with dire necessity upon the tender heart of the Savior; He can receive without pollution; yes, even receive into His heart without injury to His purity. "This man receives sinners." Contrary to the maxims, and customs, and ways of the world, Jesus keeps open house for outcasts; when all other doors are shut, this man's door is open. When everyone else has bid you go your way as an unclean thing, not fit to be looked upon, this man still stands crying, "Come unto Me! Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." Blessed fact! May you prove its truthfulness, dear friends, by going to Jesus yourself, even though you are in the worst sense a sinner.

"This man receives sinners"—not, however, that they may remain sinners, but to pardon their sins, to justify their persons, to cleanse their hearts by the Holy Spirit—to preserve their souls by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, to lead them on from strength to strength, to enable them to serve Him, and to show forth His praise, to have communion with Him, and to enjoy His love—"This man receives sinners" at last, to reign with Him in glory, everlasting, when the world and sin shall have passed away. Thus much we have noticed with regard to the fact. O blessed Spirit, give poor troubled consciences power to rest in this sweet truth of God.

I want your attention to another thought, namely, *the consistency of this fact*. It is a most consistent and proper thing that this man should receive sinners. If the Pharisees had not been rendered useless by their prejudice, and would have considered the matter a little while, they might have thought so, too. Consider *His person*—who was this man? He claimed to be, and even they, themselves, must have acknowledged Him to have been by descent, the Son of David. It was most natural that the Son of David should receive sinners. It is what David did—you expect to see the Son of David doing what His father did before Him. Do you not remember when David fled to the hold, in the cave of Adullam, that it is written, "Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered themselves unto him, and he became a captain unto them"? The very first band of men that ever served under David were most disreputable characters in the eye of Saul and his government. They had escaped from their country, partly impoverished through the tyrannical conduct of Saul, and probably being knee-deep in treason against him, they escaped to put themselves under the leadership of that captain of bandits called David. It seemed but natural that the Son of David should receive just such a company when He began to establish His *spiritual* monarchy. The New Jerusalem is founded upon Christ Jesus who is pure and perfect, but its first stones are hewn out of the quarries of sin. Our Lord Jesus, like Solomon, builds the temple of the Church, but the materials come from among those Tyrian sinners who are strangers and aliens by birth. The Savior takes, as His father, David, did before Him, discontented bankrupts, and distressed traitors that they may make up His band. If they had thought of that circumstance, they might have seen that it was not quite so strange that the Son of David received sinners.

If you and I reflect a while, we shall remember that *the types* which were set forth concerning Christ all seem to teach us that He must receive sinners. One of the earliest types of the Savior was Noah's ark, by which a certain company, not only of men, but also of the lowest animals, were preserved from perishing by water, and were floated out of the old world into the new. See, going up the hill on which the ark is built, not only the fleet gazelle, the timid sheep, the patient ox, the noble horse, the generous dog, and the fair creatures that you would wish to spare—but here comes the lion, his jaws all stained with blood; here is the fierce tiger, and the wild hyena, the filthy swine and the stupid ass—creatures of all kinds come here and find shelter! Who complains? I hear no voice lifting up its veto and crying, "There is no room for the swine here; there is no room for the fierce tiger here." The ark was ordained on purpose to save some of every kind; and just so, our Savior Jesus receives all sorts of people into Himself, and it is no marvel if this man receives sinners! Fly here, you loving and tender doves! Come here, you sweet birds of purest song! But ho, you ravens, eagles, vultures, and birds of evil name, you hurry here, also, for the ark receives all who come! A very prominent type under the Levitical dispensation was the City of Refuge. If a man had slain another, he fled from the pursuer of blood with hot haste and swift

foot, and ran at once into the City of Refuge, and the gates were shut and he was preserved. Now, brethren, you would not have thought it a strange thing if you had seen a man-slayer fleeing to the city—you would have thought it far more singular if any came there but man-slayers! “Why,” you say, “this city has been set up and ordained on purpose that men who have been men-slayers might find refuge within its walls, and therefore, it is natural to find the red-handed man come fleeing here.” Beloved, Jesus Christ is the City of Refuge! Who should flee to Him but the sinner needing refuge? And who should need shelter but those requiring sanctuary from the avenger of blood? When you see the guilty hastening to Jesus, you say, “It is in keeping with the type, and it is no marvel whatever that He receives them.”

The scapegoat, again, was a very manifest type of the Messiah. They laid the sins of the people upon the scapegoat’s head, and then it took all their iniquities away into the wilderness. Now, suppose some objecting critic had said, “This goat which is set apart in the worship of God actually bears sins upon its head, and here are sinful people coming to put their sins there.” Who else should come? What was the meaning of the scapegoat, if there were no sin among the people of Israel? Come here today, not you righteous—for you need no scapegoat—but you sinful ones! Here is the sin-bearer in type before you, set apart to bear the iniquity of the people. He is about to be driven into the wilderness to take sin away; come here and put your sins upon him, for unless you come, the ceremony will have no meaning whatever! Look through any of the types, and with very few exceptions, the thought of sin is prominent, and the doctrine that Christ is to come into the world to save sinners is clearly written upon the front of the whole set of types of the Old Testament.

Let us remark again that *the metaphors* which Christ has used to set Himself forth, many, if not all of them, imply that He receives sinners. What is written concerning Him? “There shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” In our hymns, over and over and over again we delight to sing—

“There is a fountain filled with blood,”

and yet again,

*“The fountain of Christ,
Lord help us to sing.”*

Now, what is the fountain for but for the cleansing of the filthy? Cleanse the already clean? Absurd! Why do they need it? If they are already pure, why do they need to wash? But the fact that there is provision made for great washing implies great filthiness, and that the fountain is furnished with a purifying element of wondrous power, namely, precious blood, seems to indicate that it was meant for great sin, unheard-of sin—sin which to the uttermost has polluted and defiled the frame of manhood. The Savior also describes Himself as a *feast* in many of His parables. A great king makes a supper, and oxen and fatlings are killed. Now, for whom is a feast prepared but for the hungry? In the parables, the feast is set not merely for hungry persons, but the blind, the halt, and the lame are called and compelled to enter. The Savior would not have delighted to set Himself forth as waters except for the sake of thirsty ones, or as meat, had there been no famishing souls. “Ho, everyone who thirsts,” He says, “come to the waters. And he who has no money, let him come buy wine and milk, without money and without price.” Why all this to persons who have no needs? *Sinners* are those who have these needs, these hunger and thirst; and they are bid to come to Christ as the gospel feast.

Moreover, the Master has been pleased to take to Himself one or two *titles* which imply that He came to receive sinners. He takes the title of physician, but as He told these very Pharisees a little while before, “The whole have no need of a physician, but they who are sick.” There is no practice for the physician in a neighborhood where every man is well; there must be sickness to involve the necessity for a physician. Why his art? Why his skill in pharmacy if men are safe and sound without it? And why Christ the Savior—the pardoner—if none to save or forgive? There is no excess in excellence in the Bible, nothing superfluous—why Christ a physician, unless for the sick? He styles Himself very frequently the Redeemer, and saints in the olden times delighted to speak of Him as their Redeemer. But a Redeemer for whom? Who needs redeeming but a slave? Who needs to be purchased into liberty but the man who is in hopeless bondage, and cannot free himself from the chains? A redeemer for men already free—how can it be? He sets free not free men, but captives! He looses real and irksome fetters! He snaps not fictitious chains which fancy binds about fretful, frivolous persons—He breaks iron chains,

and snatches real yokes from off the necks of the thoroughly bound. There can be no Redeemer in the fullness of the title unless the persons are enslaved, and His office must relate to such. I think I may distinctly say that if all the titles of the Savior do not involve or suppose the existence of sins, most do, and that either directly, or indirectly, they would furnish an argument to me to show that this man came into the world to receive sinners.

If more evidence were needed, I would point you to the Savior's *miracles*. The miracles which the Savior performed were very few of them miracles of judgment; they were almost all miracles of mercy. They were performed upon the sick, symbolical of His spiritual miracles upon the morally sick. They were performed upon persons possessed of devils, as if to show at once that even the devilish element which enters into man's rebellion is not too strong for the Savior to conquer, or too foul for Him to touch. His miracles were sometimes worked on the dead, and those, as you will remember, in different stages of corruption. The young child in Jairus' chamber was yet sweet of flesh as though she had just fallen asleep—He quickened her. The young man at the gates of Nain was taken out to be buried—already there were tokens which made the mother say, "Let us bury our dead out of our sight." But the Almighty voice quickened him. As for Lazarus, he had been dead four days already, and his sister said, "By this time he stinks." And as if to betoken that Jesus Christ can deliver not only from incipient sin, but from sin in its foulest stage of corruption and putridity, He spoke to Lazarus and said, "Lazarus, come forth." These miracles must have had some meaning and some teaching. If He thus touched men and healed their natural infirmities, how can you think He will not, whose mission is mainly spiritual, heal spiritual infirmities? He might have said, and said truly, "Though I heal you, that is not the grand design of My mission—My kingdom is not of this world, nor are My healings intended to be of this world, either, in their grandest development—I descended from heaven to heal sick souls, to raise the spiritually dead, and conquer disease in the realm of spirit, rather than in the physical world." This day every miracle of the Savior seems to cry to me, to you, "Diseased souls, look to Jesus Christ, and be saved!"

Did you ever observe how many of His *parables*, also, are to the same effect—how, time after time, as in the three memorable parables of the chapter before us, it is the sinner who He is teaching, and it is God's love in forgiving sin that He is endeavoring to set forth before the eyes which self-righteousness has made, alas, so dim and blind? He is constantly telling us of a vainglorious Pharisee whose prayer is a mass of reeking pride, and of a penitent publican whose humble cry brings justification from on high. He speaks of two debtors, who had nothing to pay, frankly forgiven; and of the one who loved most, because he had most forgiven. He talks of a barren fig tree, spared to be dug about and fertilized; of a wounded man, pitied and succored by a good Samaritan; of loiterers admitted to the vineyard at the 11th hour; and of poor, and halt, and lame, entertained at a banquet of love.

I need not continue longer in this strain, for I think the consistency of the fact is evident to you all. I can well picture before me Jesus Christ receiving sinners, but I cannot imagine Him, I cannot, with the utmost stretch of the imagination, picture Him as rejecting sinners. I cannot read of the rest of His life, and then think of Him as saying, "Stand back you unclean." I cannot suppose Him with a crowd before Him, crying, "Far from Me, you ungodly! Keep a distance from this pure and sacred Being who condescends to look upon you!" And I cannot—I will not try, either—I cannot fancy it possible that He will reject you, my dear friend, if you go this morning into His presence, and humbly seek His face. It would be altogether a departure from His constant mode of action, and there can be no such departure, for He is the same yesterday, today and forever! Thus, I think, we have shown the consistency of the fact with the Person and work of Christ.

Observe, *the condescension* of this fact. This man, who towers above all other men, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners—*this* man receives sinners. This man, who is none other than the eternal God, before whom angels veil their faces—*this* man receives sinners. It needs an angel's tongue to describe this mighty stoop of love. That any of us should be willing to seek after the lost seed of the house of Adam is nothing wonderful, they are of our own race; but that He, the offended God, against whom the transgression had been committed—that He should take upon Himself the form of a servant and bear the sins of many, and should then, as man, be willing to receive the vilest of the vile, and blot out their transgressions and iniquities—this is marvelous! It is only rendered believable at all by the fact

that God Himself declares it, and that abundant witnesses testify to it. I do think that if, for the first time, any but God had told the angels of this, they could not have conceived it as true; and I do not wonder that sometimes sinners under a sense of sin cry out, "It is too good to be true!" It were, indeed, too good, if it were looked at from our side of the question, but viewed as coming from God, the infinite fountain of all grace and mercy, it is believable, it is joyfully certain. It is the greatest wonder in heaven, or earth, or even in hell. There is no marvel like the truth of God that, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," that He who ever lives bowed His head to die for sinners; and having made atonement for sin, now receives the very chief of sinners into His heart's love, and makes them His companions and His friends.

Oh, will you kick against such condescension as this? Will your hearts be like iron when you think of such favor as this manifested to sinful men? Sinners, when God stoops, will you not stoop? When from the highest heaven, He seeks you, will you not seek Him? When you thus see His love so infinitely revealed, are there no drawings of heart, are there no meltings of penitence towards the bleeding Savior? Surely cold drops of horror might stand even upon marble, or ooze forth from granite at the sound of Calvary's groans; and are there no tears in your eyes, no thoughts of melting, moving penitence, when you mark such mercy and compassion manifested towards you? Jesus condescends to receive sinners, and yet they stand out against Him! Be astonished, O heavens! Be ashamed, O earth!

We do but touch that point, and now let us notice *the certainty of this fact*. That "This man receives sinners" is undeniable. Sometimes when the sinner comes, Jesus is standing on the doorstep, and before he begins to knock, he is safe in the Savior's arms, and finds himself forgiven before he has time to make a complete confession. At other times, men have to knock, but the very first knock opens the door. Some of us stood knocking four or five years, unbelievably knocking, but still knocking anxiously, craving mercy and not finding it. Ah, but we did find it after all. It does not say that He will show you that He has received you in the next minute or two, that He will pour peace into your spirit the first moment He receives you—but He *will* receive you. If He tarries, wait for Him; knock, and knock, and knock again, for there never yet was a soul that could say, "I was a sinner—I went to this man, and He did not receive me." You are growing weary, are you, young man? These three or four months that you have been watching and praying have tried your patience. Ah, dear brother, don't you see the cross and the Savior hanging on it? If you look to Him, your time of suspense will doubtless be over at once. You have made a mistake—darkness has been over your eyes; you have been looking in the wrong places—to your feelings, your penitence, your faith, rather than to Him. Or, if it is true that He has kept you waiting, yet wait on, hope on, hope always. While the lamp holds out to burn, despair must not trample down your soul. Jesus must receive you—He did receive sinners once, and again, I bid you, remember that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever! He must receive you—cast yourself on Him, and you shall find that He will receive you. There is a great multitude of people here this morning, and yet among us all, there is not one who can say, "We sought the Lord and He would not receive us," but there are many hundreds here, who, though they had a sorry time of it in the season of conviction, yet can clap their hands and say, "Truly, truly, the Master does manifest Himself to all who cry to Him in truth." Try Him, then, and you will find it true with you, too.

I shall want you now, dear friends, for a moment, to permit me to show *the adaptation of this fact* to many who are now present. "This man receives sinners," is an announcement well adapted to many of this congregation. It is so very plain. If it were a sentence which needed much explanation, it might not suit the multitude. There would be some who would think it over, and say, "Alas! Such a text hardly meets *my* case; it is a mystery; I cannot get at the bottom of it." But this is so simple, "This man receives sinners." You know what it is to be received into a house? You go, you knock. The door opens. You are received. This is all you have to do in the matter of salvation, too. You go as you are to Christ; you knock; you are received. It is a blessed sentence from its plainness.

It is very blessed, too, from its personality. I can see my name in it. You will say, "How?" Well, dear friends, I wish you may be able to see yours. "This man receives *sinners*." It does not say He receives John, Hannah, Sarah, Mary, and Thomas; it says much better than that; it says, "This man receives *SINNERS*." Now, there may be a mistake about my name being Charles; and if I found it written in God's Word that He received a person of my name, I would always be excessively anxious about the registra-

tion; I would be afraid lest I should not really be the person described; but when it says, He “receives *sinner*s,” I am very clear about this meaning me, for I know I am a sinner; the devil himself, liar as he is, dares not say I am not a sinner! No, he oftentimes does me very good service by telling me how very clearly that is my name; and I never thank him for anything but that—that he does sometimes help one to read his title clear by enabling one to see distinctly that he *is* a sinner. Well, *you* are a sinner—then the text means you—and, “This man receives sinners.” If you were in some country, say in the center of Africa, wandering about at night amidst a crowd of huts, wondering where you could find lodging for the night; if you saw a board put up very legibly printed with these words, “This person receives white men,” why you would say to yourself, “That is it.” You would not care that it did not say, “This person receives John Smith or Tom Brown.” It would be quite enough for you, “He receives white men.” You are a white man, and you would say, “He receives me.”

Now, this man receives sinners, you are a sinner—then He will receive you. Suppose we reverse it, and there were put up a notice in one of our streets, “At this house, they receive black men.” Now, I cannot conceive any black man saying, “They will not receive me because I am so very black.” “Why,” he would say, “it says they will receive me, and the blacker I am, the more certainly is this invitation meant for me. If I am a jet-black man, then I am very black, and they will, with less hesitation receive me.” I cannot suppose a half-caste man saying, “Well, I have a little white in me, therefore, I feel sure they will take me.” He might feel proud of it, but then there would come afterwards the thought, “I am not clear that this is meant for me, if I am not *all* black.” So if there are any of you who are a little self-righteous, and say, “I do not know whether I am such a sinner as some people are,” you *may* doubt whether you are a sinner, but you who *know* you are sinners right through to the backbone, sinners everywhere and every way, there cannot be any doubt about *you*, your name is as clearly there as possible! There is plainness and there is personality.

But there is *presentness*, too. “This man *receives* sinners.” Sometimes, on the doorsteps of work-houses, you may see a very sorry sight late at night—a company of men, women, and boys crowding on the doorstep to spend the night there, because they came too late. There must be an hour when the work-house must be shut, and the refuge for the night closed, but they arrived too late and outside they must be kept. But you never saw a soul shivering outside Christ’s door on the doorstep of eternal ruin, because it came too late in this life. There was the thief—he had a hard run for it, but he just reached the door in time. Without doubt, it is written on the top of my Master’s door, “This man *receives*—at all times and at all seasons—this man *receives* sinners.” It will be a sorrowful day for you, some of you, if you die as you now are, when this sentence will be blotted out, and you will see written over the door of mercy, “This man *received* sinners.” Then it will be the hell of your hells that He did receive sinners once, but that you never came; that when it was said, “He *receives* sinners,” you passed by carelessly and proudly, and would not enter; and now mercy is a thing of the past, and you are shut up where hope can never come, in the flames of hell. But as long as life lasts, dear hearers, that inscription stands in all its glorious presentness, “This man receives sinners.”

Do observe *the unqualified sense* in which the sentence is put, “This man receives sinners.” But how? What sort of sinners? How are they to feel? How are they to come? Not a word is said about their coming, or their preparation, but simply, “This man receives sinners.” Some sinners came to Christ walking; others came to Christ limping on crutches, having lost a leg—He never turned any away because they came on crutches. One man came on his bed—indeed, he did not come, but was brought by other people; Jesus received him all the same for that. There were some who did not seek the Lord at all, but Christ Jesus came to them, and received them by a blessed victory of divine grace. He receives sinners, and the only stipulation that is put in at all is, “*Whoever will*, let him take the water of life freely.” If you will, take. If you have a will to Christ, if God has given you a will towards Christ Jesus—and if you have nothing beyond that will—no feelings, no emotions, no works, no experience which could qualify you for Him—if you do but will—“Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.” “This man receives sinners.” Sometimes if you want to get a child into an Orphan Asylum, you might just as well keep the child yourself as go through the expense and trouble of working to get the child in—there are so many difficulties to be encountered in effecting your design. If you want to get to Jesus Christ, there is no trouble, no expense. Going to Jesus Christ is coming to an open door of mercy. The city of

the New Jerusalem, you remember, had four gates, and we are told none of them are ever shut, “They are not shut at all by day, and there is no night there,” so that come as we may, “This man receives sinners just as they come to Him.”

II. Now, I wanted to speak upon the second head, but I had not sufficient forethought to store up the time, so we must only say of that just this—Jesus Christ, having once received sinners, enters into the most familiar and endearing communion with them that is possible. HE FEASTS WITH THEM—their joys are His joys, their work for God is His work for God. He feasts with them at their table, and they with Him at His table; and He does this wherever the table is spread. It may be in an attic, or in a cellar; in a wilderness, or on a mountain; He still eats with them. He does this now in the ordinances and means of grace by His Spirit; and this He will do in the fullness of glory when He takes these sinners up to dwell with Him. Sinners are not merely permitted the parings of mercy, but the very marrow and fatness. They are not only allowed to sit and dip their feet in the margin of the stream, but they may wade in, and find it a river to swim in—they shall not, in heaven, sit in the outer circle—they shall draw near the throne and *reign* with Jesus. There is nothing which Christ will not give to sinners. They shall be crowned; they shall have harps of gold; they shall dwell in the many mansions near to God Himself! There is no second and lower party, as it were—He does not receive sinners, and put them at the lower end of the table, below the salt. He receives sinners and eats with them; He receives them into the soul and flower of Christian life and Christian privilege among all the favored saints of the celestial courts.

I would to God I had time to plead this matter home with some who are here this morning, and who are not believers in Jesus. Oh, sinner, trust my Master, and you shall be saved! May the Spirit of God make you trust Him now! I know your sense of unworthiness; I know you feel you are not fit to come, but *He* says nothing about fitness, so why should *you* say it? Christ lays down no conditions, so why do you make conditions? “This man receives sinners.” “Why,” says Bunyan, “I felt myself such a sinner once that I could do nothing but fly to Christ, and if He had had a drawn sword in His hand, the terrors of hell were so dreadful that I could have borne the terrors of that drawn sword to escape from the wrath of God.” But here, instead of the drawn sword is the warm loving heart. Fly to it, sinner! God help you to fly now, that you may be saved. If He should reject you, come and tell us. I would not knowingly preach a lying gospel—and if you can prove to me that He does not receive sinners, we will have a Sunday service and preach that the gospel has failed; for we will preach the truth of Him and not speak falsely for God. When you find He rejects a coming sinner, let us hear it, that our hopes may no longer be as bright and high as they are now, if we are to be deceived after all.

Try the Lord Jesus, sinner! Taste and see that the Lord is good. Come to Jesus now! Come as you are! Come now to Him! You need not stop to get to your houses to bend your knees to pray; one cry, one tear, one LOOK with the believing eye will do it. “Look unto Me, and be you saved, all you ends of the earth.” While we thus preach, may the Master enter into your hearts by His Spirit, and may you be led to Him, and we will praise Him together, world without end. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke 15.

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