

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WHO LOVES CHRIST MOST?

A Sermon

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MARCH 3RD, 1904,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, February 3rd, 1876.

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged,"—Luke vii. 41—43.

WHEN we commence the Christian life, it is very natural that we should say to ourselves, "We do not wish to be second-rate Christians, or ordinary Christians,—much less to prove like the Laodicean professors, neither cold nor hot, or, like those of whom the apostle John wrote, 'They went out from us, but they were not of us.'" I like to see the holy ambition of the young convert who desires to bring forth much fruit to the glory of God,—to love Christ much, and manifest that love by every possible act of devotion to him. Truly, my dear friends, you need not be as your fathers have been, for we have often provoked the Lord, and have many times done what we ought not to have done. There is plenty of room for improvement upon the past generation, and we would earnestly urge those of you who are commencing the heavenly race to run faster than we have run,—to keep your eye more steadfastly fixed upon the goal, and to continue more resolutely in the right way than we have done. We do not desire that you should imitate our mistakes, or that you should fall into our backslidings. We wish that yours might be the highest conceivable form of Christian life; and we know that, if it is to be so, there must be in you intense love to Christ.

My object, at this time, is to give some directions which, peradventure, the Spirit of God will bless, especially to beginners, that they may be taught to love Christ much, and manifest that love as this woman did. It may be that some of us, who have been for years on the right road, may also get stirred up to greater zeal and devotion to our Lord. Possibly, we may hear our Master saying to us, as he said to the angel of the church of Ephesus, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." If his Spirit shall make our love to burn more vehemently, we may

be able to start anew, and after a better fashion, in the work and service of our Lord. This were "a consummation devoutly to be wished."

With this end in view, I shall begin by speaking upon the fact that *we must all be saved in the same manner*. Whatever our desires may be to outrun others in the Christian race, we must begin by being saved in exactly the same manner as others are. Then, secondly, I shall try to show that *it will help to increase our love if we have a deep sense of our own sinfulness*; and then, thirdly, provided we have this deep sense of sin, and, in consequence, possess a burning love to Christ, *this will lead us to show our love very much as this woman did*.

I. First, then, whatever our desires may be to serve our Master to the utmost,—to be in the front rank of his servitors,—yet we MUST BEGIN WHERE OTHERS BEGIN.

There is the same door of entrance for us as that which was opened to the very chief of sinners; for there is no difference between one sinner and another in the sight of God, so far as the plan of salvation is concerned. There may be many differences in other matters; but, in the matter of salvation, there is nothing which places one man in a different position from another, or which allows him to be saved in any other way than the one way which God has laid down for a sinner's salvation.

You notice, in the parable before us, that *both the parties were in debt*: "the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty;" but they were both in debt. So, if some men have plunged into the grossest vice, and defiled themselves, and polluted their lives, they are certainly in debt five hundred pence; but if others have been kept from overt acts of transgression, yet, since their hearts have gone astray from God, and since, with their desires, and with their lips, and in many respects even in their actions, they have broken his holy law, they also are in debt; fifty pence, it may be; but, still, they are in debt. There is not one man among us, who can stand before the Most High, and say to him, "I owe nothing to thy justice, for I have never infringed thy righteous laws." Any man who should say that would be a liar, and the truth would not be in him. If we say that we have no sin, or that we have not sinned, we lie in the face of the living God, and in the teeth of our own conscience, too. So, we are all in debt, even if the amount differs in each case.

We also learn from the parable that, *although both the parties were in debt, neither of them had anything with which to meet the liability*: "they had nothing to pay." One only owed fifty pence; but, then, he had not the fifty pence; nay, he had not even one penny out of the fifty required to meet the amount. The other debtor owed five hundred pence, and his plight was just the same, for he had nothing to pay. It sometimes happens that the man, who owes the most, has the most to pay, but it is not so here. He has nothing to pay. And, sometimes, the man, who owes but very little, may be the one who has something with which to meet his obligations. He has pulled up just at the right time; and

though he is insolvent, yet he can almost meet the debt. But it is not so here. He has nothing to pay. Neither of them could produce so much as a single penny, and that is your case and mine, dear brethren; we have nothing to pay. All that we have, or ever shall have, is due to God already. If there were any assets, they would not belong to us; and there is nothing in reserve,—nothing that we can look for, that will drop in, towards the close of life, with which all our old scores can be wiped out. Under the law, there is nothing for us but debt, debt, debt; and even if we had the power to pay our old debts, new ones would soon swallow up all our capital. But we have nothing with which to meet our old debts. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself;" is still God's daily demand upon us; and if we were able to meet it, it would not in any way make up for the deficiencies of the years that have gone by. Here, we all stand upon an equality; we are all in debt, and we have none of us anything with which to pay that debt.

And here is the glory of God's mercy in dealing with sinners who believe in Jesus. In the parable of the two debtors, we are told that *the creditor freely forgave them both*. He did not say to either of them: "I will set you a certain time, and you shall pay me so much a week until you clear it off." Oh, no! he forgave them both, wiped the score out altogether. He did not ask anything of them, for he knew that they had nothing; but he forgave them, says the text, frankly; that is, freely. He did not forgive one of them because his debt was a misfortune, which he could not avoid; but he frankly forgave them both. He did not look for any worthiness in either of them, or expect anything from either of them; but, as an act of pure gratuitous favour, because he delighted to show kindness to his poor debtors, he said, "There, go home, both of you; I shall never ask you for the amount of your debts again. I have crossed it off my book, though I have received nothing whatsoever from you."

Now, this is just what the Lord, in his infinite mercy, does for all poor sinners who come and trust his Son. He gives them a receipt in full, for there is One who has paid the debt for them. All glory be to his name, it has been paid in full; but, so far as we are concerned, the Lord does not give us pardon because of our tears, or prayers, or repentances, or even because of any merit in our believings, for our very believings are marred by unbelief, but he forgives us freely. And he does not forgive us because he thinks that, in the future, we shall improve upon the past. Oh no; we are his workmanship when we do improve, and it is he who must have the credit of our improvement. But he forgives us freely, "according to the riches of his grace," passing by iniquity, transgression, and sin, and remembering not the wickedness of his people, "because he delighteth in mercy."

Here, then, we are all on a level; and if any young Christian thinks that he starts with an advantage over others, he makes a great mistake; and he had better go back, and start where all pilgrims

to Zion must start,—at that wicket gate which John Bunyan describes, or, better still, at that cross where Christian lost his load, and whence he went on his way rejoicing. You must come down from that high horse, young man; your birthright is not worth a farthing to you, your church-going and your chapel-going are not worth a single penny to you; you must trust in Christ just as a harlot or as a thief must. It is true that you have been moral, and I thank God for it. It is true that you have been preserved from contamination with an ungodly world, and I thank God for it. But, still, in the matter of the soul's salvation, "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ is the way of salvation for the most immoral, and for the most moral, too. You and I, dear friend, must go together to the Lord Jesus, and see in him the full atonement made, and the utmost ransom paid, and then we must accept, as poor bankrupt sinners, the free gift of a full discharge through the sovereign mercy of God whom we have offended.

It is absolutely essential for us to begin here; for, if we do not start our Christian life rightly, we shall never make progress in it. If there is a mistake in the first course of bricks laid, or if the foundation is not well dug out, or if things are done improperly at the beginning, there are sure to be all sorts of mischief in the rest of the building. Therefore, I charge you, begin by coming to Christ, as naked sinners needing to be clothed. Do not come to him in the filthy rags of your self-righteousness, seeking to have a piece of his spotless robe of righteousness tacked on, for that can never be. If you think of passing your counterfeit coin with Christ's pure gold, you are making a fatal mistake. I charge you to begin as lost, ruined, and condemned sinners, for that is what you really are; coming to Christ like that, and trusting in him, you shall be saved, you shall be adopted into the divine family, you shall be sanctified in Christ Jesus, and, in due time, you shall be glorified through him, and through him alone.

II. Now, secondly, I want to show you how our lives may become more intense than the lives of many other professing Christians are through our love being more fervent than theirs is. In order to attain that end, WE MUST HAVE A DEEP SENSE OF OUR OWN SIN. "Which of them will love him most?" "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most."

I can imagine someone saying, "I was never, in very deed, so great a sinner as some have been; must I, therefore, love Christ less than those who have been greater sinners than I have? Will this morality of mine,—in which I do not trust for a moment, and concerning which I do not speak boastfully,—will this put me at a disadvantage in comparison with others? Shall I never attain to such love as that woman had who was a sinner?" Listen, my friend. Suppose that the man, who owed five hundred pence, only thought that he owed fifty. He would not love the creditor, who forgave him, any better than the one who did really owe the fifty pence, would he? It was not the amount forgiven, as you will readily see, which was the cause of the greater or the lesser love;

but it was the consciousness of the amount,—the realization of its greatness, which would be the cause of the greater love. I do not doubt that there are some very great sinners, who have been forgiven, who yet do not love Christ much; and, on the other hand, there are some who, in the judgment of men, and, perhaps, in the judgment of God, are nothing like such great sinners, who, nevertheless, love Christ more, the reason being that these greater sinners never had such a deep sense of the enormity of sin as these, comparatively speaking, lesser sinners have had. The question turns, you see, not so much upon the actual amount of debt, as upon the consciousness of the magnitude of that debt,—not so much, in the matter of love, upon the indebtedness, as upon the sense of that indebtedness; so that you, who have been kept in the ways of morality, before you were converted, may rightly place yourselves among the greatest debtors, and, peradventure, may love Christ even more than some others do, who have actually been grosser offenders, but who have never been awakened to such a full sense of their sinfulness as you have had; and, consequently, do not think themselves to be the greatest debtors to God. It is, dear friends, a deep sense of our sinfulness, coupled with the perfect consciousness of our forgiveness, that will work in us intense love to Christ.

Let me further say that *anyone, who has been forgiven very great open sin, ought certainly to have the greatest and strongest motive for love to Christ.* You cannot always tell how love comes into the heart. I do not deny the duty of love, but love does not come merely as a duty. You love your mother, or you love your wife, and it is your duty to do so; but you could not be made to love either of them simply by being told that it was a duty. You do it because of the natural impulse within your heart which moves you to love. In like manner, love to our Heavenly Father, and love to Christ is, no doubt, a duty; but it is much more than a mere matter of duty. That is a cold sphere for love to live in; and she soon gets away from the polar regions of duty to the more tropical climate of the garden of Gethsemane and the place called Calvary. She loves because she cannot help loving,—because she must love. The gratitude within her heart is so great, that she cannot help loving the Lord who has done so much for her.

I hope that is the case with any of you who were once drunkards, or who had lost your character, or who had sinned against God in an open way, and even dared, perhaps, to blaspheme his holy name. As you think that over, oh, how your heart ought to burn with love to your Lord! You remember how Paul writes concerning adulterers, and drunkards, and all sorts of grossly sinful people, and then says, "Such were some of you, but ye are washed." This should bring tears to the eyes of all whom it concerns: "But ye are washed;"—you are singing your Saviour's praises, though, once, a profane or licentious song would have suited you better; you are now bowing your knees in prayer, though, once, those knees never knew what it was to make an obeisance before the Most High; you are loving him now with all your heart, though, once, you saw no

beauty in him that you should desire him. Brothers and sisters, I will not say that you ought to love Christ much; rather will I say that I feel sure that you do. If you realize what he has done for you, you cannot help loving him much; and I trust that, in the outpouring and manifestation of love, yours will be a life as vigorously good as once it was shamefully bad,—a life as full of the fire of heaven as once it was full of the fire of hell,—a life as much above the common life of men as once it was below what the life of men really ought to be. God grant that it may be so with you!

Now I will address myself to those who thank God—without any of the Pharisaic spirit,—but very humbly thank God that they were not allowed to run into the same excess of riot as others, but were early brought to a knowledge of the Saviour. I say to you, dear friends, that *you also may be among those who love Christ much, if you have a very deep sense of sin.* A venerable servant of God, whom most of you know and respect, has made a remark which I fully endorse. He says that he has noticed that the deepest convictions of sin do not come, as a rule, to men of coarse life, but to those who have been of upright moral character. My own observation has taught me that, very often, drunkards, and other persons who have lived openly evil lives, when they are converted, are brought on a sudden to Christ, and made to rejoice in him; while some of us, who were kept from such sins as they have committed, have had a far greater sense of horror and terror inflicted upon us than they have ever experienced. I have many times found that the deepest sense of sin has been felt where the actual sin has been the least. There are, no doubt, exceptions to this rule; but I believe it is the rule; and the explanation is, that the ungodly man, by a long life of sin, has so seared his conscience that, even when the Spirit of God comes to him, he has not that delicate, acute sense of sin which another man has, who, by God's grace, has never been permitted to blunt the edge of his conscience.

I will tell you another thing. I believe that, in many Christians, the sense of sin is much stronger ten years after they have been saved than it is at the time of their conversion. There is not any despair mixed with it, and the fear of punishment has gone; but a sense of horror at the terrible guilt of sin will sometimes come over a Christian who is far advanced in the divine life; nay, the further he is advanced in the divine life, the more will horror take hold of him whenever he sees sin, even in others, and still more in himself. Some glib professors talk of having got out of the 7th of Romans; I hope they will grow in grace until they get into the 7th of Romans! It seems to me as if they were in the 1st of Romans, so they have a long way to travel before they will get into the 7th of Romans. The nearer you get to perfection, the more horrified you feel because of the sin that still remains in you; and the more horror you feel at your sin, the more intense will be your gratitude to the bleeding Saviour who has put that sin away; and, in consequence, the more intense will be your love to him.

I charge you, Christian people, if you want your piety to be increased, never to blunt your sensibility of sin. Do not begin to

look at sin in any light which takes away any of its blackness. The devil himself is not so bad as sin is, for it is sin that made the devil. Satan was a holy angel until sin came into him, but sin itself was never anything else but sin,—a horrible thing, and it never will be anything else but sin, look at it in whatever way you may. Some have spoken of sin as being merely a failure, or a slight slip. God keep you, beloved, from ever using such language as that! Sin, in a child of God, is a damnable thing,—as damnable as it is most atrociously wicked; and if it were not for the grace of God, which takes it away, the brightest saint would soon be banished from God's presence. Sin is always an evil thing, but in a child of God it is a worse thing than in worldlings, for he sins against greater light and knowledge than they possess.

Brethren and sisters in Christ, if you desire to cultivate, as I trust you do, the feeling that you did owe your Lord five hundred pence, which he has freely forgiven you, *you must often think of the spirituality of the law of God.* We think, at first, that the ten commandments only mean what we see on the surface; and if we have not broken them, we feel happy; or if we have broken them, then we feel some conviction of sin; but the longer we live, and the more the Spirit of God deals with us, the more we discover that the law contains the condemnation of every evil thought, and temper, and imagination. Think, for instance, when we come to discover, in connection with the command, "Thou shalt not kill," that he who is angry with his brother without a cause is a murderer. Who among us has completely escaped that sin? Do angry thoughts never arise in our hearts? Ah, then we begin to discover that we have broken that command, and that, in this sense, we are murderers; and we find that there are more men, who have broken that law, than have been put to death by their fellow-men. It is just the same with each of the commandments. I need not go into the details of them; but may the Spirit of God make you often go into the details, till you look into your own life, and are horrified, and you say, "Why, where we fancied we saw righteousness, we see ourselves altogether condemned before the all-seeing eye of God."

If you would have a sense of sin, in the next place, *endeavour more and more to appreciate the excellency of God.* O thou holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, when I think of some of thy creatures, and compare myself with them, self-conceit may set my mind at ease; but when I look up to thee, and remember that the heavens are not clean in thy sight, and that thou chargest thine angels with folly, I feel afraid to come into thy presence. In the visions of the night, when we have thought upon the purity and spirituality of God, our hair has been ready to stand on end as we have realized how far we are from such perfection as his, and we have been ready to cry, with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." If the Holy Spirit will teach you to feel like that, then you will love Jesus Christ for having had pity upon you, and provided a way by which all your sinfulness could be taken away.

Another blessed sharpener of our sense of sin is a *consciousness of sin's tendency*,—knowing what sin really is, and what it would do if it could have its way without those blessed checks which omnipotence puts upon it. What would sin do, if it could? What did it do when God gave it liberty? It took God himself, and accused him, brought him before its bar; and there, the sinner dared to sit and judge his God,—yea, and to condemn his God, and even to slay his God. This is what sin always does whenever it can. “The fool”—that is, the ungodly man,—“hath said in his heart, There is no God.” He means, “No God for me; I do not want any God. If I could have my own way, there should not be any God.” And every offence against God's law is a wish, on our part, to be greater than God,—to have our way instead of God having his way;—in a word, to push God off his throne that we might sit there in his place. O sin, I cannot but hate thee, now that I see thee red with the blood of the Son of God! I cannot but abhor thee now that I see that thou wouldst let hell loose into this world if thou couldst do so. A Christian cannot help hating sin in proportion as he loves God who has forgiven him all his trespasses.

One thing which has often made me feel great tenderness of soul is a *sense of the divine love*. If you ever offend a person, and that person, instead of being in the slightest degree angry, lets fall a tear, but says nothing; and if you hear afterwards that he has been laying himself out for your good, and that the very thing, about which you were angry, was really intended to be a blessing to you, oh, you feel as if you could never forgive yourself! To do a wrong thing, is bad at any time; but to do a wrong to the One who is so good and so kind as God is,—oh, have you not often said to yourself, “How could I have done this? I was one of God's chosen people; he loved me before the foundation of the world, though I did not know it. Christ wrote my name on his hands, and on his heart, and shed his blood to redeem me; yet I did not know it. I even ridiculed his name; yet, all the while, he had prepared a place in heaven for me, and he had made up his mind that he would save me, that his grace should seek me. I did not know anything about it, and I went on in the frivolity and foolishness of my heart against him.” This thought makes sin appear exceedingly sinful, as being committed against a God who is all goodness, and altogether love and mercy; and so we feel ourselves to be indebted five hundred pence, and not merely fifty.

Above all, dear friends, I know of nothing that can make us more sensitive about our guilt, and conscious of it, than *the realization of what Jesus Christ is to us*. I think this poor woman was helped to weep by the sight of his feet. They had not been pierced then; but I know that it helps us to weep in penitence when we can see his dear, his blessed feet that were pierced for our sins, and look upon his hands, and remember his words, “These are the wounds that I received in the house of my friends;” and then look into his side, and see that the gash goes right to his heart; and, all the while, realize that each of our sins became a nail, and unbelief the spear, to pierce his hands, and feet, and side. That wonderful

love of Jesus Christ to us has never changed, it has never been repressed by our ingratitude, or made to cease even by our forgetfulness of him. He loved us even to the death; and, after death, he has continued to love us still. He loves us so that he cannot be content even in heaven until he gets us there with him. Being himself there as our Head, he is determined to bring all his members there. Just look at Jesus Christ a minute, and then look at sin. Oh, what a loathsome thing, what a monster, it then appears! I am sure, dear friends, if you are beginning to think little of sin, it must be because you have been thinking little of Jesus Christ. You cannot have met your best Friend lately, or else you would never parley with his enemy. O beloved, lie in Christ's bosom, where all the sweetest perfumes are, rest your head upon his breast, where the myrrh, and aloes, and cassia are to be found; and you will never crave the leeks and garlic of Egypt! After having been with him, and eaten of the heavenly manna, you would not be able to eat the dust and ashes of this foul world. So, in proportion as you get near to Jesus, you will hate sin, and you will love him, who bore your sin, and carried it all away, that you might be free from it for ever.

There are many other topics I might mention so as to sharpen your sense of sin; but I pray the ever-blessed Spirit to keep your mind and heart sensitive towards sin, for be you sure of this,—that you can never exaggerate your own guiltiness in God's sight. When you have the lowest notion of yourself, you are getting the nearest to the truth; when you feel your sin to be exceeding sinful, you do not even yet know how sinful it is; for—

“God only knows the love of God,”—

and God only knows the sinfulness of man. Perhaps, if any man among us could see his sin as it really is, he would go mad. I am persuaded that, sometimes, God spares men, who have been great sinners, the horrible revelations which he gives to others, because they could not bear them. If they did ever see themselves as they are, they might be driven to despair. So he sometimes leads them by easier ways than he does some others, and he thus gives to others the opportunity of putting themselves down among the five hundred pence debtors, and to love him most because, after all, they are conscious of having had the most forgiven.

III. My time has fled, so I must only say very briefly, in the third place, that IF WE GET A BURNING LOVE FOR JESUS CHRIST, IT WILL BE WELL FOR US TO SHOW IT AS THIS WOMAN DID. How shall we do it?

First, *by desiring to be near him.* This woman, in her desire to be near Christ, came right up to his feet. Augustine admires the gracious audacity of this woman. She had been very bold when she was a sinner; her shamefacedness was gone when she was a sinner, and it was also gone when she was a saint. May we, too, love Christ so much that we cannot be content to live at a distance from him, but may we be amongst those who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and abide close beside him!

The next point in her for us to imitate is *the boldness of her*

confession. Some of Christ's disciples came to him by night, but this woman came to him by day. They dared not approach him when anybody saw them, but she cared not who saw her. I would that you, who love Jesus much, were as bold as she was in the acknowledgment of your faith. Come out, and confess Christ, saying, "I have had much forgiven; therefore, I will tell the whole world of what the Lord has done for me."

Then, next, *this woman had deep humility*; for, bold as she was, she rendered the lowliest service that she could to Christ. May you be such willing slaves to him that washing his feet will be the work in which you delight! If I may but wash his feet,—help his poor people,—look after a few infants in the Sunday-school,—do any little thing for him,—if I can only have some smiles from him, though they be only such as come to menials, I will be glad to get them.

Then, *imitate this woman's penitence.* She bathed his feet with her tears; so do you show him how deep and true is your repentance. It is well not to make a show of repentance to men, except by your actions; but let your whole life, and your inmost soul, make a show of it before Christ. Wash his feet with your tears; with your contrition, refresh him.

After washing his feet with her tears, this woman wiped them with the hairs of her head. *Imitate her self-denying service.* Show your love to Jesus in some special way. I do not know what particular form your service may take; but let it be some loving, tender, self-denying work for your dear Lord and Saviour. Make a perfect consecration of yourself to him, as this woman did; may the Holy Spirit help you to do so! But you will never do it unless you have a deep sense of sin; so, brothers and sisters in Christ, I come back to that point, because that is the chief thought I want to leave in your mind. Do feel sin to be a bitter and hideous thing, and do feel yourself to be a great sinner. You will never pray so well as when you have a tear in your eye. You will never serve God so well as when you have been standing in the publican's place, and saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." I am persuaded that we, ministers, do not preach with effect if we preach as if we were wonderful saints looking down on you, poor sinners. Oh, no! When we are ourselves tender in spirit, God helps us to be tender to the humble and contrite among our hearers; out of our hearts, by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, comes power that helps others to be humble and contrite before God. We are nothing to boast of, so let us never boast. Though we are accepted in the Beloved, and perfect in Christ Jesus, forgiven, saved for ever, (blessed be his name!) yet this is no reason for us to lift ourselves up, but to lift Christ up. It is a cause for gratitude, but not for conceit; so we will feel that we have had much forgiven, and will love him much who has freely forgiven us all our trespasses. May he help us to do so, and his shall be the praise for ever and ever! Amen.
