

crowded street. Her heart's been taken captive; the moment has seized her. The message of the gospel comes home to her very soul as a word of salvation. "Faith cometh by hearing" (Rom 10:17). What a mystery, but it's real. "Hear and your soul shall live" (Isaiah 55:3). Tears now stream down her face; joy and peace flood her soul as those precious words of promise are laid hold of. She's fastened upon his gracious invitation.

Out there that afternoon she received pardon and forgiveness immediately by faith. Sometime later in Simon's house, the Lord said to her, "Thy sins are forgiven" (v48). This, however, was but a verbal confirmation of an already present reality. Before ever speaking a word to her, he had already told Simon, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven" (v47). She had been a forgiven soul from the very moment she believed. Peace, pardon, and forgiveness accompany the reception of the gospel by faith. It happened in the street; it was confirmed in the house.

It was the same way with that woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5. When she "touched his garment...she was healed of that plague" (v29), "she was healed immediately" (Luke 8:47); then a little later she came and fell down before him, "knowing what was done in her" (v33), to hear these words from Christ, "Be whole of thy plague" (v34). But it was already "done in her."

Even so with the woman in Luke 7, the Saviour verbally confirms that which had *already* taken place. The key to both is *faith*: to one, "Thy faith hath made thee whole" (Mark 5:34), and to the other, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke 7:50). She was "saved" immediately "through faith" (Eph 2:8) out in the street the moment she believed. And what we witness happening in Simon's house with this humble penitent, with her tears, and the washing, and the kissing, and the anointing with ointment—these are not some supposed "conditions" in order that Jesus might receive her; rather, these are happy signs of grace, the sure evidences of love, the outworkings of "faith which worketh by love" (Gal 5:6). She had "received the Spirit by the hearing of faith" (Gal 3:2,14), and "the love of God was shed abroad" in her heart "by the Holy Ghost" which was given unto her (Rom 5:5).

An all-important gospel observation here is that *personal character is no hindrance to those who would come to Christ*. This woman was a public shame and disgrace; she was "a sinner" (v37). She was a well-known sinner, for Simon declared, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner" (v39). Her ill-fame had branded her! Her way of life was the common talk of the town. Decent persons wouldn't associate with her. She was cut off from all respectable society. She was like a leper of old put outside the camp of social life.

How could it be that the gospel was "good news" to such a one of ill-repute, to such a slave to sin? How was it that the gospel was such sweet music to this woman of shame and disgrace? The answer lies in the very *nature* of the gospel itself—"Ho, *every one* that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath *no money*; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk *without money and without price*." Christ "gives of the fountain of the water of life *freely*." "If *any man* thirst," he says, "let him come unto me and drink." "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life *freely*" (Isaiah 55:1-3; John 7:37; Rev 21:6; 22:17). The drawing power of the gospel is its freeness and fullness. She was drawn by the cords of love from a willing Saviour who delights in saving "sinners."

Did ever any come to Jesus for a cure, and go away without it? You would find something in yourself, but you find nothing but what you have reason to be ashamed of; but let not that hinder, but further your coming. Come as you are; come poor, come needy, come naked, come empty, only come, only believe. His heart is free, his arms are open; 'tis his joy and his crown to receive you. If you are willing, he never was otherwise (John Mason).

*Approach the fountain bead of bliss,
That's open like the sea,
The buyers that are moneyless,
To poorest beggars free.*

*Incline your ear, and come to me;
Hear and your soul shall live:
For mercies sure as well as free,
I bind myself to give.*

Needy sinners have nothing to offer to Christ, nothing to bring. Their goodness

and merits will procure no favor nor open any door. Promises to do better are to no avail. Reformation of life, whether great or small, is altogether worthless. Why? because the natural man is a guilty, polluted, lost, sin-sick soul.

"When we were yet *without strength*... Christ died for the ungodly." Sinners are *without strength*! They are without strength to obey God's law, "for the carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." They are without strength to please God in any way, "for they that are in the flesh cannot please God." They are without strength to love God, "for the carnal mind is enmity against God." They are without strength to do even one single-solitary good thing in God's holy sight, "for there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom 3:12; 5:6; 8:7,8).

Christ brings this very truth before us with the force of these words, "And when they had *nothing to pay*, he frankly forgave them both" (v42). That's the gospel! He's illustrating on this occasion to Simon that whether we feel we owe a great debt to God, or not-so-great a debt, it doesn't matter; still the fact remains that every sinner is in debt head-over-heels with "*nothing to pay*!" This is a universal dilemma. We have nothing! Be you whoever you may be, you have nothing in the sight of God to offer! Be you of noble blood or of peasant's stock—*nothing*! This describes all of your assets in the sight of heaven—*nothing*! Moral or immoral—*nothing*! Religious or irreligious—*nothing*! "And when they [*both of them!*] had *nothing to pay*"—**Penniless Paupers** in the sight of God! This is the gospel our Saviour preached. The coming sinner doesn't have anything to give, to bring, to plead, to show, to offer—Nothing at all!

*Nothing good have I,
Whereby thy grace to claim,
I'll wash my garments white,
In the blood of Calvary's Lamb.*

Lay hold of this word "nothing." One of the primary reasons sinners do not come to the Saviour is because they do not believe they're that bad off, bereft of all goodness, yea, bankrupt before God. They don't think their need is as desperate as the Bible declares. They still feel that they can do some-

thing to qualify and fit themselves in some way to come to Christ. They fancy that they are able to meet some supposed demands in order to measure up to a standard of acceptance. They stand aloof from Christ fooled by a belief that surely they can perform the proper preparatives, or fulfill the conditions, or meet some imagined terms they feel are required in the gospel, that they can contribute something—perhaps by their sorrow and tears, maybe by their mourning and brokenness, or surely by their promises and repentance. They refuse to believe that they have nothing, are nothing, can do nothing, and can contribute nothing! They have never felt the force of this word "**nothing**."

**Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, look to thee for dress,
Helpless, come to thee for grace;
Black, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.**

The gospel is suited to those with "*no money*" in the market of salvation, to those "*without strength*" with "*nothing to pay*." This truth is the great leveler of the sons of men. "There is *no difference*: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God...God hath shut them *all up together*, that he might have mercy upon all" (Rom 3:22,23; 11:32 margin). This truth recognizes the fallen and deplorable condition of all men. Any "**BIG I / little you**" notions in men's minds are swept away by plain declarations of Scripture—"Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is *only evil continually*" (Gen 6:5). "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom 8:7). "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom 3:12).

The aim of the gospel is to qualify the sinner, not to direct the sinner to qualify himself; and the gospel qualifies the sinner simply by showing him that the only gospel qualification for salvation is the fact that he is a sinner! He's qualified! God has already qualified every son of Adam! This is the beauty and fitness of the gospel in that it totally does away with any and all supposed distinctions in its hearers! They're all qualified! And this is not because of anything within themselves, but because of God's declaration!—"There is no difference: for all have sinned" (Rom 3:23).

Sinners have no business looking within themselves to judge whether they be qualified for Christ's call. The gospel would not be "glad tidings to all people" if *any* were excluded due to some unfitness (Luke 2:10). When we deny that the gospel call is universal, applicable to all, and claim, instead, that Scripture only addresses invitations to specific people—the penitent, the convicted, and so on—the eyes of men are turned *within*, searching subjective experiences, rather than to the promises of God—"He that believeth on him is not condemned" (John 3:18).

The gospel is that you believe in Christ Jesus; that you get right out of yourself, and depend alone in him. Do you say, "I feel so guilty"? You are certainly guilty, whether you feel it or not; you are far more guilty than you have any idea of. Come to Christ because you are guilty, not because you have been prepared to come by looking at your guilt. Trust nothing of your own, not even your sense of need... Jesus wants nothing from you, nothing whatsoever, nothing done, nothing felt; he gives both work and feeling. Ragged, penniless, just as you are, lost, forsaken, desolate, with no good feelings, and no good hopes, still Jesus comes to you, and in these words of pity he addresses you, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (Charles Spurgeon).

Sinners are born qualified to come to Christ; we're "conceived in sin, shapen in iniquity, and brought forth speaking lies" (Psalm 51:5; 58:3). We don't need anything else to fit us for the Saviour; we don't need to do anything; we don't need to feel anything; he stands ready to receive us just as we are. We don't stand at the Cross to be washed because we've "repented"; we don't stand at the Cross to be washed because we're "bowed to the lordship of Christ"; we're there to be washed *as a sinner*, and *nothing but a sinner*. It's not because of anything we've done or experienced; it's because of *what we are!* "God be merciful to me *the sinner!*" (Luke 18:13).

*'Twas for sinners that he suffer'd,
Agonies unspeakable;
Dost thou doubt thou art a sinner?
If thou canst, then hope farewell.
But, believing what is written—
"All are guilty"—"dead in sin,"
Looking to the Crucified One,
Hope shall rise thy soul within.*

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1Tim 1:15). The apostle declares that the gospel is worthy of acceptance by all! It should be received *immediately* by all who hear it. Whosoever will look to this word of salvation, will find it looking to them, whoever he may be. It's a gospel for all, for all sinners; and the Scriptures don't categorize and qualify these sinners with such terms as "*sensible* sinners," "*feeling* sinners," or "*penitent* sinners." The Scriptures know nothing of such adjectives in the proclamation of the gospel; it just speaks of *sinners!* "Christ Jesus came to save sinners." The door of mercy is open to all, and no man has any right to bar it with any restrictions or limitations in any way.

The publican in the temple did not say, "God be merciful to me a penitent sinner." He *was* a penitent sinner, but he did not plead his penitence. If you're ever so penitent and convinced of sin, don't mention it as an argument, lest you be accused of self-righteousness. Come as you are, as a sinner, and as nothing else. Exhibit your wounds. Bring your spiritual poverty before God, and not your supposed wealth. If you have a single penny of your own, get rid of it. Perfect poverty alone will discharge you from your bankruptcy. You must be *nothing* and *nobody* if Christ is to be your all in all.

*Let our debts be what they may,
However great or small,
As soon as we have nought to pay,
Our Lord forgives us all.
'Tis perfect poverty alone,
That sets the soul at large;
While we can call one mite our own,
We have no full discharge.*

The gospel is sent to all sinners who hear it, whatever their condition. When John Bunyan preached, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you!*" (Acts 2:38), he said:

One man might have stood up in the crowd and said, "But I helped to hound him to the cross!" "Repent and be baptized *every one of you.*" "But I drove the nails into his hands!" saith one. "*Every one of you,*" says Peter. "But I pierced his side." "*Every one of you,*" says Peter. "But I was one of them that did spit in his face!" "*Every one of you!*" says Peter. Oh! what a blessed "*every one of you*" is here! How willing was Peter (and the Lord Jesus, by his ministry) to catch these

murderers with the word of the gospel, that they might be monuments of the grace of God!

Let nothing in your mind and heart drive you beyond the door of mercy, since it's not locked nor bolted up against you in any way. See Christ in John 5, being "persecuted by the Jews," who "sought to slay him" (v16); and further on, "they sought the more to kill him" (v18); yet it is in the very heart of his discourse to such who hate him with a passion, and who would instantly kill him if they could, that he says, "*These things I say unto you, that ye might be saved!*" (v34).

Is that not written that *none* might despair of hope in him? The apostle Paul was "a blasphemer, a persecutor, an injurious person"—yea, "the chief of sinners"; but his testimony was, "I obtained mercy" (1Tim 1:13). A Manasseh found mercy; a Mary Magdalene found mercy; to say nothing of the thief on the cross. They obtained mercy; Christ willingly received them. And what about all of those murderers around Jerusalem? Christ's killers, every one of them! The first sermon preached after the ascension of Christ was preached to those very murderers of the Son of God; for these words are part of that sermon: "Ye have taken him, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). The next sermon, and the next, and also the next, was preached to these same murderers, to the end that they might be saved (Acts 3:13-16; 4:10, 11; 5:30; 7:52). To these wretches who killed the Prince of Life, the gospel was preached indiscriminately, regardless of their acts of villainy! And, behold, thousands of them were saved by grace.

Here is hope for the vilest of the vile—"Christ died for the ungodly"; and here we must come in the name of Jesus, standing on no other ground, pleading no other plea than this, "Christ died on the cross for the ungodly, and I trust in him."

*Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind,
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

—Dan Shanks

PENNILESS DAUPERS

"Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1)

There's an interesting story of Jesus and a woman who was "a sinner" in Luke 7:36-50. The context (vv 31-35) shows the setting to be that of Matthew 11:16-19, which is followed with this grand invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (v 28).

Can you see this woman?—miserable in herself, having spent years in sin and unfulfilled lusts, having gone from one lover to another, unable to quench her inward thirst, unable to satisfy that longing within. See her making her way into the crowded street as she eases into the gathering of publicans and sinners to hear the Master—"Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? and why do you labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken unto me and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear and your soul shall live" (Isaiah 55:2,3).

Immediately her attention is won. She presses forward to catch those words that are full of music; she hears a gospel with a melody sweeter than the birds can sing—"The Son of man is come to seek and to save the lost. Come now, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters" (Luke 19:10; Isaiah 1:18; 55:1). The willingness of Christ to save echoes through every word. She knows he's telling her story—sins as scarlet, thirsty and lost. Her heart witnesses to the truth.

This woman becomes oblivious to everything around her. This man and his message is all that's important now. It's strange, but suddenly she finds herself all alone; yet she's still in the midst of a