

The Unexpected Attitude of Jesus toward penitent sinners.

An astronomer who was a sinner.

Copernicus is the astronomer who revolutionized the thought of mankind about the universe. He wrote a treatise entitled, “*The Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies.*” The printers finished it just in time to place it in his hands as he lay dying. This was in May, 1543. But this man, who gave the human race a new conception of the universe did not see himself before God as a great astronomer. He saw himself as a sinner. On his grave at Frauenburg, Poland one can read the epitaph that he chose for himself. It says: “I do not seek a kindness equal to that given to Paul; nor do I ask the grace granted to Peter; but that forgiveness which Thou didst give to the robber—that I earnestly pray.”

Copernicus numbered himself among those people Jesus came to call.

Jesus came to common people, publicans and sinners.

When Jesus came in his ministry, He was in many ways similar to former prophets, but He was also different. He worked miracles; changed water to wine, fed multitudes, healed lepers, and raised the dead. He came to the common people, and He associated with publicans and sinners. He told them,

Luke 5:31 ... “*It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick.*” 32 “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

This bothered the people in authority.

The authorities rejected him and the repentance.

John the Baptist had called all Israel to repentance. He even included King Herod in the call. Luke says,

Luke 7:30 But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

They did not like John because he called them sinners. They thought they were righteous. A lot of those who refused John were Pharisees. Many of the Pharisees would not confess their sins, although they claimed to be strict followers of the law of Moses. They rejected John the Baptist, but some of them were interested in Jesus.

Jesus dines with a Pharisee.

Early in his ministry Jesus associated with the Pharisees. Luke says in his gospel that,

Luke 7:36 “... one of the Pharisees was requesting him to dine with him. And He entered the Pharisee’s house, and reclined at table.”

Jesus vs. Pharisees—not yet in direct conflict.

Up to this time in the ministry of Jesus his relations with the Pharisees and Sadducees had not broken into open hostilities. The Pharisees—the strictest sect regarding the law of Moses—were watching him. His influence among the people was increasing. They saw that as a threat because they wanted to influence the people themselves. But they had not yet declared him a public enemy, and a blasphemer.

Luke tells us about a Pharisee, Simon, who was apparently wavering in his attitude toward Jesus. He invited Jesus to dinner, where he evidently intended to examine him more closely.

Eating meals in new testament times.

In those days the people did not eat their meals by sitting in chairs with their legs under tables. It was their custom to recline on couches with the guests lying on their left side, perhaps propped up on the left elbow, and their feet, unsandalled, stretched out on the couch.

It was also customary for people to come into the house during a feast, and sit and talk with those who were invited.

The invited guests reclined at table, while the uninvited guests sat around the wall. Also, in these oriental feasts the houses were often times left open, and uninvited strangers frequently passed in through the open courtyard into the guest chamber, and looked on. Apparently on this occasion, there was just such an uninvited stranger to that Pharisee's house, but a stranger not in the way you might be thinking. This stranger was a woman, a sinner.

Simon would have no contact with sinners if he could avoid it. He would never issue an invitation to an immoral woman to come to his house!

The immoral woman.

Luke says,

Luke 7:37 And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining *at the table* in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, 38 and standing behind *Him* at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet, and anointing them with the perfume.

She knew of Jesus. She had heard, perhaps even seen, his miracle at the gate of the city. She was a sinner, and she knew it. But Jesus had said, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ...” So she stood at the master’s feet—weeping, remembering her sins, and wishing what had been done could be undone.

The definition of repentance.

Theologically and ethically, repentance is that sorrow for sin and contriteness of heart which produces or leads to newness of life. True repentance is a change of heart. The sinner is made to see and be sensible of his sin. He is grieved and humbled before God on account of it. Not so much for the punishment to which sin has made him liable, as that by his sin God is dishonored and offended, His laws violated, and the sinner's own soul polluted and defiled. This grief arises from a love of God. It is accompanied by a hatred of sin, a love of holiness, a fixed resolution to forsake sin, and to do what is right in God’s sight.

Now this woman brought an alabaster box of ointment; and more, she brought her love for the master. It was a bold step for one like her to press in, uninvited, in broad daylight, into the house of a rigid purist like Simon the Pharisee, but the knowledge that Jesus was there gave her courage. And consider this also: it was regarded among the Jews as a shameful thing for a woman to let down her hair in public, but she willingly made this sacrifice because of her affection for Jesus.

The opinion of a Pharisee.

Luke 7:39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.”

Simon would have placed emphasis on “... were a prophet” because he intended to examine Jesus to see just what sort of man this was.

The witness of the Old Testament.

It is striking that, although the Old Testament scriptures abound in passages that attest to the greatness of God's mercy to the repentant, the Jews of our Lord's time had no place for such in their system nor in their practice. Such reasoning could not come from unfamiliarity with the Scriptures. No. It stemmed from ignorance within, a darkness of the heart. Simon, being a Pharisee, does not acknowledge any sin in his own soul, nor any shortcoming in his own life. And

thus, mistaking himself and his true condition, it is not strange that he regards this woman, who had been outwardly bad, as hopelessly lost.

Simon made several **mistakes**: He thought the woman was unpardonable and unpardoned. She was neither. He thought Jesus was undiscerning and ignorant of the woman's state. But Jesus was more thoroughly acquainted with her than Simon could ever be. Simon thought he was nearer God's kingdom than the woman was. In reality, he was farther away.

All these conclusions and opinions regarding Jesus Simon had voiced to himself. Not aloud. But the one who looks on the heart heard and judged.

The judgment of Jesus.

Luke 7:40 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher."

The King James is more poetic as it reads: "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." "Master, say on."

Luke 7:41 "A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred *denarii*, and the other fifty. 42 "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?"

Simon well knew the facts upon which the Lord based the parable. The money-lender to Simon's mind was one who loans money at interest. The denarius was the chief silver coin as used by the Romans and the most common in Jesus' day. It was the pay for a day's work. So it was five hundred days' work against fifty. Who will love him more, Simon?

The answer is obvious.

Her sin was great, but great sin should not hinder us from coming to the Savior for pardon. One of the greatest difficulties that men make for themselves is that they believe sin may keep sinners from pardon. But Jesus makes it plain that great sinners can receive pardon just as well as little sinners. In this story a great sinner becomes a monument to mercy and forgiveness.

While nobody recommends that we go out and sin in order to intensify our sense of guilt and then attempt to qualify for Christ's mercy, we do believe that great sins are no obstacle to the Lord's forgiveness—if the sinner is willing to repent.

Think for yourself: if a patient is brought into a hospital, a mass of wounds and hemorrhages and bruises; will not the magnitude of his injuries call forth pity from the people who give care, and argue for his immediate admission for treatment. In the same way, great sin is an appeal to the Savior for mercy. It is not an obstacle.

Luke 7:43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." 44 And **turning toward the woman, He said to Simon**, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet,

but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. 45 “You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46 “You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. 47 “For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”¹

King David.

The Bible tells us much about David—as a shepherd boy, fighting Goliath; as a young man who fled from the king to save his life because of his respect for God’s anointed; as the mighty king who built Jerusalem and stood against the enemies of Israel. All of these recall David’s glory, and he was great, but we remember David more because of his repentance.

He had lusted for another man’s wife, Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and desired her so much that he committed adultery with her. Then to cover his sin he used his authority as king to commit murder; he had Uriah killed. Yet when confronted with his sin by the prophet Nathan David did not deny it. He said, “I have sinned against the Lord.” (2 Sam 12:13.)

And God forgave him. David knew that he was forgiven much. He wrote in psalms 51,

- 1 **B**E gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my
transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned,
And done what is evil in Thy sight,
So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak,
And blameless when Thou dost judge. Psalm 51:1-4.

The immoral woman contrasted with Simon the Pharisee.

It seems that this was the first time Jesus had looked at the woman, and He asks Simon to look at her. Here was Jesus—an invited guest—and Simon had

¹ Emphasis: author.

neglected three points of customary hospitality. He had supplied neither water, affection nor honor for Jesus, but...

- The woman's tears supplied **the water** that Simon had failed to give;
- The woman's kisses supplied the **affection** Simon failed to show for his guest.
- The precious oil with which she anointed the Savior's feet supplied the **honor** Simon failed to provide for his guest.

Simon had failed as a host to anoint the head of Jesus, the nobler part, with ordinary oil; but the woman had anointed his feet with costly oil. This penitent, sinful woman had done far more for Jesus than had the Pharisee. It had been expected of Simon, but not of the woman.

What would the Lord say to me under similar circumstances?

When we reflect about what the Lord said to Simon as He reclined at the Pharisee's table we must wonder what Jesus would have said had you or I been in Simon's place. Imagine the Lord as your dinner guest—and you are in your typical attitude and disposition—then the Lord leans over and says, “I have somewhat to say unto thee.” What would it be? What would He say?

You and I both know it would be the word each of us needs to hear the most, and at the same time perhaps the most difficult to bear. Yet it would be for the good. What would it be? Would He say -- “Let him who standeth take heed lest he fall ...”? Or, would it be -- “Your sins, which are many, are forgiven.”?

Is there something of which you would repent?

The story is told about the Swedish chemist, Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite. He awoke one morning, picked up the newspaper and read his own obituary. It said, “Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, who died yesterday, devised a way for more people to be killed in war than ever before, and he died a very rich man.”

Actually, it was Alfred's older brother who had died. A newspaper reporter had mistakenly reported the death of the wrong man. But the obituary had a profound effect on Alfred Nobel. He decided he wanted to be known for something other than developing a means to kill people efficiently, and getting rich in the process. So he established the Nobel prize. It was an award for scientists and writers who foster peace.

Nobel said, “Every man ought to have the chance to correct his epitaph in midstream and write a new one.” If you could read your own obituary in

tomorrow's paper, what would you do? Is there something in your life you would change?

How many times shall we forgive?

Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" **22** Jesus *said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Jesus went on to tell the disciples the parable of the Wicked Servant. That servant's lord forgave him a sum equivalent to nearly 6 million dollars, but when the servant's fellow slave asked him to forgive a hundred day's wages, he refused. When his lord learned of his refusal to forgive his fellow the lord restored his debt, and turned him over to the torturers. So, the Lord is merciful, and willing to forgive a great debt, but he expects that we also should have the same quality of mercy.

Another time, the Jewish authorities attempted to put Jesus to the test, so he told them of John the Baptist, then put a parable to them.

Matthew 21:28 "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' **29** "And he answered and said, 'I will, sir'; and he did not go. **30** "And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, 'I will not'; *yet* he afterward regretted *it* and went. **31** "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They *said, "The latter." Jesus *said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. **32** "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

He is faithful and just to forgive us, to offer us work in his vineyard, but He expects sincerity on the part of the forgiven. You cannot lie to him either by word, by disposition or by deed.

John wrote in his first letter,

1 John 5:5 And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. **6** If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; **7** but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. **8** If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **10** If

we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

1 John 2:1 **M**Y little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.

The sheep thief.

There is the story of two brothers who stole sheep from their neighbors. Law officers arrested them. The court convicted them, and ordered that they be branded on their foreheads with the letters “S T.” The letters stood for “sheep thief.”

One of the brothers, unable to bear the stigma, left for a foreign country, but the men there asked him about the letters, and what they meant. In shame he left there. Afterward, he wandered from land to land, becoming increasingly bitter, until he died.

The other brother repented of the theft, and became a Christian. He did not leave his home. He said, “I can’t run away from the fact that I stole some sheep, so I will remain here until I can win back the respect of my neighbors and myself.” The years passed, and he established a reputation for integrity and respectability.

One day a stranger came to town and saw an old man with the letters “S T” branded on his forehead. He asked a native what they meant. The native thought about it for awhile then said, “It all happened so long ago I have forgotten the details, but I think the letters are the abbreviation for saint.”

You can, with the Lord’s help, overcome a mistake.

Therefore, avoid sin when possible, but if you fall into it, do not despair. Rely on your advocate who effectively pleads your case in heaven.

Here is what Christ does on our behalf. **He propitiates**² the Father, that is, He appeases the divine wrath that falls upon our sin, thus rendering him favorable toward us. **He reconciles**³ us to God, restores us to favor thus enabling us to be at peace with him. **As a ransom**⁴ for us, He paid the debt, permitting us to go free from the bondage of sin.

² ἱλασμός, οὐ, ὁ— *expiation, propitiation.*

³ καταλλάσσω--*reconcile* (Rom. 5:11; II Cor. 5:18-19).

⁴ ἀπολύτρωσις, εως, ἡ orig. *buying back* a slave or captive, *making him free* by payment of a ransom.

The Lord forgives.

He has extended the blessings of this propitiation to the whole world, and has made it available to all mankind. Martin Luther well said, "It is a patent fact that thou too art a part of the whole world; so that thine heart cannot deceive itself and think, the Lord died for Peter and Paul, but not for me."

No man is outside the mercy of God, except as he deliberately places himself there through the rejection of the plan which God ordained to save him.

In the book, that is entitled, *The Silence of Dean Maitland*, the author tells how the Dean fell into sin, and then committed one sin after another to cover up his first sin;--and, worst of all, permitted an innocent man to be sent to prison for his crime. All kinds of adversities broke over him. He lost his wife and children. His home became a wilderness. Yet he would not repent. He said, "I cannot, I will not, I dare not, I must not repent."

But at length, the man he had wronged, the man who had gone to prison for his crime, wrote him a letter. In the letter the man said, "I forgive you."

The letter broke Maitland's heart, and brought him to repentance. He said, "God called to me through many years, by many judgments; but I repented not until I was forgiven." ⁵

Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

Ephesians 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, 8 which He lavished upon us.

So, seek the Lord's forgiveness and favor. It is freely given to those who genuinely want and need it. When you have obtained it, value it as your most cherished possession, and pass it on to others who may be indebted to you.

⁵ Macartney.