

This Man Receiveth Sinners

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**Preached At Galeed Chapel, Brighton, Lord's day morning,
January 18th, 1891**

**"And the Pharisees and scribes murmured saying, This Man receiveth sinners
and eateth with them." (Luke 15:2)**

That which was Christ's reproach in the eyes of the Pharisees and scribes is His glory in the eyes and hearts of His people, and it is their mercy and salvation. How suitable is the Person of Jesus Christ, and how it pleases the Holy Ghost to make that suitability known to His people! As Paul says: "*For such a High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.*" (Heb. 7:26) And if the Holy Spirit but spake that word into your hearts, you would feel it: "Such a High Priest." No poor sinner ever could, or ever would, be allowed in his person to approach a holy God. Therefore if there were no holy Mediator provided, even Jesus Christ, all poor sinners would remain cut off from God; hence Christ's suitability.

I remember on one occasion when at Gower Street, I quoted that verse from the Hebrews, "*Such a high priest became us;*" and there was a poor girl in the chapel who was in trouble about her soul, a total stranger to me. When she heard it, she said to herself: "O that he would repeat it!" and continued saying that. As I went on I perceived a very solemn feeling come upon my spirit, and I stopped and said: "Perhaps it might be a comfort to some poor soul present, if I repeat that Scripture," and I repeated it: "*Such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners;*" (Heb. 7:26) and as I repeated it, the Holy Ghost was pleased to drop it into that poor girl's heart and deliver her soul; and she was soon after taken to Himself.

You who are taught of God know that you cannot get near Him without Jesus Christ. God, in the law, has shut up the way and guards the tree of life; but Jesus opened a new and living way in His own Person, the glorious God-Man Mediator, Jesus Christ. Ah, hell must receive everyone who does not know the way to God by Jesus Christ! But hell cannot receive one sinner who finds his way to God by this only living Way, the Man Christ Jesus; and none can be severed who are joined to God in the Person of Christ. "*What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.*" (Matt. 19:6) O what a favour to have eyes to see, and a heart to receive, Jesus Christ! And what a blessing to feelingly need Him! To have "sins immense as is the sea," and to cry with the poet:

"Hide me, O Gethsemane!"

This Man, Christ Jesus, always has appeared to His people. He said, "*Abraham rejoiced to see My day, he saw it and was glad.*" (John 8:56) That is "the day of the Lord" when God appears to His seeking people. The Psalmist says: "*This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*" (Ps. 118:24) None can make days but God. "*I form the light and create*

darkness." (Isa. 45:7) The Psalmist says again: "*Thou makest darkness, and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth.*" (Ps. 104:20) That was a night to Abraham, when he had to take Isaac and offer him up. And when the night was darkest and the knife was raised to slay his son, God said: "*Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.*" (Gen. 22:12,13) If ever you are in bondage, bound under the law, and then lift up your eyes, the eyes of a divinely-wrought faith, and see Jesus in the sinner's place, that will be "the day of the Lord" to you. Christ is suitable to troubled people. He is the "Brother born for adversity." He came right into Abraham's trouble, and Abraham saw the day of Christ, and was glad.

After that, you find that He appeared to Jacob. When he left his father's house and was on his way to Padan-Aram, he was in real trouble. "He lighted upon a certain place and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep." And there the Son of God appeared to him, so that he said: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And he was afraid and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (Gen. 28) Again, when Jacob was returning to his father's home by divine direction, "there wrestled a Man with him." If people are not in trouble they do not want Him. Where people take things up of themselves, after a time they drop them again; but when "this Man" comes and lays hold of a sinner, faith clings to Him. Thus when He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaketh," faith answered: "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." And you know that cannot be without trial, because flesh must be weakened. "*And He said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men and hast prevailed.*" (Gen. 32) Thus we see how God appeared unto Jacob and received him, Have you ever felt like Abraham when he said, "*Who am but dust and ashes?*" (Gen. 18:27) The way to acceptance with God is not by being clean, but by being a poor broken-down creature, a sensible sinner, and finding acceptance by the merits of the Saviour through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Look at Moses. Forty years before the Lord appeared to him, he thought himself somebody. Stephen said that when Moses slew the Egyptian, "*he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them, but they understood not.*" (Acts 7:25) He had to go to the back side of the desert for forty years, and when God wanted him he was not ready. People are never ready when God wants them, until He works the will. Moses said to God: "*Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt.*" But God appeared to him in the bush which was not consumed, although it burned with fire, representing the eternal God in our nature, humanity. Now that is the greatest sight God can reveal God in our nature. "*Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God;*" and he took off his shoes and worshipped. (Exo. 3)

God appeared to Job. Job said: "*I know that my Redeemer liveth.*" (Job 19:25) He could not have known that without a revelation of Him: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." He who had reckoned that his life was wind and his eyes

should no more see good; a poor wretched creature full of trouble, yet there he was, blessed with this revelation of God in Christ. This is "*the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.*" (Eph. 1:17) The only way in which the people of God can have certain knowledge of the Son of God is by revelation. This revelation gives a certain uncontrollable evidence of the Person of Christ. I call it "uncontrollable," because it cannot be restrained or kept back. On the contrary it controls everything when it comes in. It beats down unbelief, scatters ignorance and darkness, and swallows up death. O what a mercy to know this most suitable, able, willing, gracious God in our nature, who being "God's Fellow," (Zech. 13:7) is able to lay His hand on an offended God and offending men, and so bring these two together! God the Father has made Him to be "the Propitiation for the sins of His people." Poor soul, if you know Him by the Holy Ghost, how soft, how humble, it will make you before God! And when you see Him, O what a sight it is! And see the effect of it. It clean cuts a man off from his sins, as to their power and his living in them. Zacchaeus, when God called him by His grace, stood and said unto the Lord: "*Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*" (Luke 19:8) O what a change! The possession of Christ and His grace manifested by the effect produced in respect of good works in different cases and circumstances! O what a blessed thing to see the glorious Person of Christ!

Paul saw Him as one born out of due time. And such is and ever must be the case with all the people of God. They must see and know Him, for none else can save their souls and do them good. Further, they see Him as crucified. John, when he saw Jesus Christ as recorded in the Book of the Revelation, saw one Object, which methinks would be brighter than all else. He says: "*And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.*" (Rev. 5:6) There were His marks, His "glorious scars," which Hart speaks of. If ever people get beyond viewing the Man Christ Jesus, they get wrong. The sight of Christ, and the reception of the sinner by Him, melts the heart with love, purges the conscience with blood, strengthens him with the strength of God, makes his face shine with the oil of God, and cheers him with the wine of God.

This glorious Man suits people who are in distress. As David suited all distressed and bankrupt Israelites and became a captain over them, so Christ suits His poor, bankrupt, helpless, and discontented people. The attractions of Christ are beyond all other attractions, and at times the eye of faith is favoured to behold in the Mediator that which no tongue can express. Hart saw Him and sung: "A Man there is, a real Man." Can your heart join with this: "Such a high priest became us?" He was tempted of the devil, but had no sin. Can you say feelingly that you need "such a high priest?" If you can say, Yes, I will tell you what it does for you. It constrains you to make a venture and plead the merits of Christ, and His Person, before God. That is a certain effect you make a venture. And tell me, if you can, whether there is a case in the Scriptures of a venture being dishonoured of God. Tell me, if you can, of any case of a poor wretched man, even an injurious person like Paul, being brought to a venture on the Man, Christ Jesus, and being dishonoured. No, blessed be God!

"A Man there is, a real Man,
With wounds still gaping wide."

"Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers." The merits of Christ, the bleeding gaping wounds of Christ, are the chambers His people are invited into. Nothing short of this: "*There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:12) This was the Man who followed the Israelites all through the wilderness; this was the "*Rock that followed them,*" (1 Cor. 10:4) to quench their thirst. To most people He is a mere name. To His people He is Man as well as God, a divine Person; and as the eye of faith sees Him, the soul wants and will own no other. There is but one "*greater light to rule the day,*" (Gen. 1:16) and there is but one Christ. As it is written: "*Having yet therefore one Son, His Well-beloved, He sent Him also last unto them.*" (Mark 12:6) And when faith traces this gift of God in our nature, what a sight it is! "*It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell.*" (Col. 1:19) The Spirit bears His witness to this in the heart, that there is no Saviour, no God, no life, out of Christ. Therefore,

"The one thing needful, dearest Lord,
Is to be one with Thee."

We have no hope but what He gives, no peace but as He is known. And how blessedly sometimes the Spirit will lead a troubled heart by giving a faith's view of Christ!

"He receiveth sinners." It is a great condescension for God to take notice of, and hold communion with, the holy angels, the elect angels; but what a stoop it is for God to lay hold of our nature, to look upon wretched sinners, vile worms, who in their own eyes, as quickened and instructed by the Spirit, are not fit to be near Him! Look at a few cases in the Word of God. Take Manasseh. What an example for sinners! Extreme, it would seem; yet every child of God says that of himself, as does Paul: "Of whom I am chief." But see how the Lord looks at exceedingly bad cases! Manasseh called upon God in his trouble: "And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him; and He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom." (2 Chron. 33:12,13) "*Lord, in trouble have they visited Thee; they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them.*" (Isa. 26:16) O what a foundation of merit and good we need! "Surely He must spurn such a wretch," one says. No, He draws him to His footstool, restores and blesses him, and sets up thereby the glory, and beauty, and exceeding riches of His grace. There is the Lamb, whom the Spirit reveals to every wretch who sighs under his felt guilt. This is the Man, Christ Jesus, whose blood cleanses from all sin, whether of a Manasseh or a Mary. Yes, and some of us have said, "Mine." "This Man receiveth sinners."

Now take another case, namely, Peter. There is a man who must really have thought himself not so bad as others, for he said: "Though all men shall be offended because of Thee; though I should die with Thee, yet I will not deny Thee." But you see he is really quickly plunged lower than the rest; for he not only coldly follows Him at a distance, but wickedly curses and swears, and denies with an oath, saying he knows not the Man. What a case! But is he left to lie here? No, for Jesus showed His pity and compassion and turned and looked on Peter; and that look broke Peter's heart altogether. You find in the last chapter of Mark, where an account of the resurrection is given, it is written: "Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter, that He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you." As if He should think: "I

know that Peter will not think of himself that he is a disciple in his own eyes." And thus He pities the worst. If He did not thus come to us, what should we do? And how could we venture to come to Him? So He singles out these extreme cases, that He may make it known that He has mercy for sinners. "*With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption.*" (Ps. 130:7) And that will meet all the ruin you have total ruin in heart and affection, and continued ruin. Plenteous redemption to cover all this.

So you find David saying in one place: "*Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.*" (Ps. 32:7) Wherever there was a trouble, God would put a song of deliverance. Look at David, wallowing in his sin, and for a long time too; not less than a year, under the most fearful state of hardness through the deceitfulness of sin. And even when Nathan came to him, see the hardness and blindness of his heart. He did not even suspect that he was intended by the parable. We do need direct convictions of sin, else we are apt to think everyone is wrong but ourselves. But when the prophet said, "Thou art the man," down fell David and confessed; and the forgiveness was spoken. It is written: "*They shall teach no more every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.*" (Jer. 31:34) You may say of some around you: "O that he were different!" Or, "O that he saw his wrong!" You may look at your friends and wish they had a different spirit and walked more tenderly and more in accordance with godliness. You might go to them with all the light you think you have on their path and with love for them, and in endeavouring to point out their wrongs and reclaim them, make a great mistake. Probably they would maintain their integrity and contend with you.

So David is an example of conviction coming straight home from the Spirit. See what he said: "I have sinned against the Lord." And this is the feeling: "I shall die." What hope is there if you see sin, and there is no mercy manifested? What hope if afflictions and sin meet together, and there is no mercy made known? But see how the Lord spoke by Nathan: "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." He did not die. The peace of God, which is said to pass all understanding, keeps their hearts and minds. One said:

"Bring no money, price or aught,
No good deeds, nor pleasing frames;
Mercy never can be bought;
Grace is free, and all's the Lamb's."

We talk about its being free, but the thing is to receive it. Then we know it is free, and under the blessed power of it in our own heart we say: "This I, the worst, receive."

Every case that seems extreme, the Lord seems to have gathered up in the Scripture to meet His people's objections. Paul said he was "an injurious person," going everywhere persecuting, trampling under foot the people of God, "punishing them oft in every synagogue and compelling them to blaspheme." If there was in Jerusalem at the time Stephen was being stoned, one less likely to human appearance than any other to be brought to the feet of Jesus, it was the young man at whose feet were laid the clothes of those who were stoning Stephen Saul of Tarsus. But the Lord had a two-fold purpose in thus permitting Saul to run to such "lengths extreme" saving

mercy to Saul himself; and that he might be an example of the superabounding grace He will show. Hence Paul says: "*Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.*" (1 Tim. 1:16) You have never got beyond the description the Scriptures give of sin and sinners, and it is sinners this Man receives. His hand gets hold of them, His life quickens their consciences and turns their backs on their former ways. When one has a taste of peace and mercy sweetly free, one is constrained in heart and spirit to say:

"Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there's room;
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"

The answer is:

"'Twas the same love that spread the feast,
That sweetly forced me in;
Else I had still refused to taste,
And perished in my sin."

Every man is saved against his will, and yet according to his will - the will of the Lord works in him. It is said, you know, that thieves, and covetous, and drunkards, and adulterers, and fornicators, cannot inherit the kingdom of God; and yet the Apostle says: "And such were some of you." (1 Cor. 6:11) What has made the change? Free grace. God has saved them, "pulling them out of the fire." What a wonder that He should do all this for such as His people feel themselves to be! Out of one He cast a legion. Out of Mary Magdalene He cast seven devils, a perfect state of devilism, seven being a perfect number in Scripture. It is one thing for a devil to go out of a man, and for the house to be swept and garnished, but notwithstanding to be left empty; and another thing for the devil to be cast out. You know the Lord will not come to the house of such a man, where the devil goes out. I believe the Lord will teach His people the difference between remorse and repentance. Remorse makes a man sorry and to wish he had not done the evil for which he is to be punished; but repentance makes him gladly own the Saviour. But this devil that goeth out, "taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and finding the house empty, swept, and garnished" - empty, no love, no repentance, no hope, no godly fear - "they enter in and dwell there." The Lord does not receive such a man; but the man whom He does receive may be torn to pieces while He is working and bringing him to Himself. But He will carry on His work, and as he casts out devils who yet tear the soul, there will be His hand to restore and lift up. One said: "My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil" ("grievously devilled" it is), as if she had not time to swallow down her spittle, for the fullness of evil that was in her.

"This Man receiveth sinners" - diseased people. There was that poor woman who went after Him in the crowd. She had an issue of blood twelve years and had spent all her living upon physicians and could not be healed of any; but directly she got near Him and touched Him, virtue was communicated and there was an end of her long trouble. "And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day, and behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity

eighteen years and was bowed together and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her He called her to Him and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight and glorified God."

"This Man receiveth sinner" - poor, dark, benighted people. "The people which sat in darkness saw a great light." What a difference there is between natural illumination of the mind attended by an elation of affections, natural affections, and that gracious enlightening of the Spirit which is always attended with life and light. This light makes a man a greater sinner in his own feelings. Still he wants to

"Creep beside Him as a worm,
And see Him bleed for him."

Look at this. You might coldly look on an afflicted person, as the Levite did on the man who had fallen among thieves. He looked at him, and "passed by on the other side," but did nothing for him. The priest under the old dispensation could only offer what was brought to be offered, and this poor man had nothing to give; so there was nothing the priest could do for him. Look at the difference between this and the good Samaritan who went where the poor man was and poured in oil and wine, bound up his wounds, and conveyed him on his own beast to the inn, and there bore all the expense saying that he would pay all that was required for him to be taken care of. And so the Lord receives His people fully and takes all the charges. "Look after him," said the Samaritan, "and I will repay you all that you spend;" and so He graciously cares for them.

Now in this receiving of the soul, what a smile you sometimes get from His blessed face! What a kiss He gives! You know how Joseph received his brethren. He fell on the neck of each one and kissed them. He may for a time keep the soul at a distance, but as Hart says: "Sudden He stands confessed!" "I am your Lord and your Redeemer." And this is how the soul is received. "*I will love them freely.*" (Hos. 14:4) "I looked for hell; He brought me heaven." That is the astonishment. Instead of his being spurned as he expected, blood is applied in the virtue of it, and the sinner is cleansed and clothed and his iniquity made to pass away from him. Ah, what a reception the reception of His people is! You know, for one to be presented to a Sovereign is considered a great thing, but he must be a fit character. Now look at the Lord of life and glory. He goes just the reverse way. The scribes and Pharisees, who are clean in their own eyes, are passed by; no notice taken of them, except to mark them for their sins and punish them. But poor, sensibly vile things are brought nigh. To them He says: "*Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" (Matt. 11:28) What a word of the God of heaven to say to sinners! And as He speaks it to the heart, what an effect it has to bring the soul to His dear footstool! If He receives you, you will be all right. Ruth was perfectly satisfied when Boaz received her favourably, but did it not astonish her! "*Why have I found favour in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?*" (Ruth 2:10) And yet, stranger as she was, she crept to his feet; for less than his favour would not do, less than his kind reception of her person would not do.

And this is what the Lord does - looks favourably on the soul, receives it, listens to its desires, removes its guilt and fear. This dear Man, this God-Man, receives sinners and does not spurn them from His footstool, but receives them into His presence and swallows all up in the sea of

His love: "Less than Thyself will not suffice." O what a big desire to fill the heart of a vile wretch! O says the devil, "What a presumptuous thing for you to think of His receiving you!" But for all that it is true, that he who cannot live without Him shall not die for lack of Him. "This Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." The Lord command His blessing. Amen.