

THE FRIEND OF SINNERS.

August 25th.] A. D. 31. [Luke 7: 40-50.

GOLDEN TEXT:—*This man receiveth sinners.*—Luke 15: 2.

The anointing of our Lord related in the preceding verses cannot be that recorded in Matt. 26: 6, Mark 14: 3, and Jn. 12: 3. The time, the woman who anoints, the objections to the anointing, and the Lord's utterances are all different; and though the host here is called Simon we need not identify him with "Simon the Leper." Nor is there any reason for supposing that the woman "which was a sinner" was Mary Magdalene.

This woman, up till this time of evil life, touched with deep penitence, follows the Lord into the Pharisee's house, and pours out her penitence and affection as recorded in vs. 37, 38. The Pharisaical host is offended and concludes against the prophetic character of Him who allows the touch of such a person. Simon's countenance may have manifested his feelings; but he who reads the heart replies to him in the touching passage before us. Addressing him by name, the Lord claims his attention: he offers it (v. 40). The "creditor" and the "two debtors" represent the Lord Himself, the woman and Simon. The representation is from the Pharisee's own point of view, according to which the woman's sins were many—his few. Suppose, then, both "forgiven," the Lord asks which debtor—the greater or the less—will love most, i. e., will have most of the love of gratitude. Simon cannot but answer—"he to whom he forgave most." By this answer the Lord vindicates both the woman and Himself; the woman in what she did; Himself in what He allowed her to do. Simon's meagre courtesy to his guest (the withholding of water, oil, the kiss, was not necessarily a violation of courtesy) is contrasted with the profusion of grateful affection shown by the penitent. The contrast is closed by the declaration that her many sins are forgiven, because she loved much; i. e., her much love is evidence that her sins are forgiven. The Scriptures do not teach that love, or any virtue, merits, pardons. Only for Christ's sake is pardon bestowed, and love is fruit and evidence of pardon.

The last clause of v. 47 is general in form, but yet refers too surely to Simon. His little love showed little sense of pardon. Not obscurely it is hinted that his being pardoned at all was very doubtful. And now He in whose hand all judgement is (Jn. 5: 22), He against whom sin is directed, He whose eye detects true penitence: says directly to the woman, as He did to the sick of the palsy, (Matt. 9: 2) "thy sins are forgiven thee." It was something that her penitential homage was not spurned; but what joy these words must have brought her! "With celestial love the Lord ascends a yet more and more exalted climax in His language."

It was natural that men who did not know Christ nor believe in Him should say, as they had done before, (chap. 5: 21), "who is this that forgiveth sins also?" They hide their unbelief under the mark of zeal for God's prerogative. Another gracious word to the woman ends the scene. She is assured of her salvation: and her salvation is ascribed to her "faith." Faith had made her one with Him, whose "blood cleanseth from all sin." (1 Jn. 1: 7, Rom. 3: 26). As in Mark 5: 34 the final word is "go in peace," not "go before thy peace is disturbed by the tumult around thee;" but "go to enjoy evermore in my service, the peace which you have now received.

RETURN OF THE SEVENTY.

September 1.] A. D. 32. [Luke 10: 17-24.

GOLDEN TEXT:—*Blessed are the eyes which see the things which ye see.*—v. 25.

The mission of the seventy is recorded by Luke only. The instructions given them correspond in many particulars with those given the twelve, Matt. 10: 1-42; Mark 6: 7-11. Their mission was temporary: they were to prepare places for receiving the Lord Himself, (v. 1). It has been said, but without authority, that Luke himself was of this number.

Having accomplished their mission, the seventy return, (not necessarily all at the very same time), joyful because the "demons" were subject to them in their Lord's name. (The plural—devils—is never applied in the original Greek to evil spirits: there is only one "devil"). Their triumph over the demons seems to bulk before everything in their mind; perhaps the more so as they had not been taught to expect it. The disciples, too, had lately failed to cast out an evil spirit (chap. 9: 40). The Lord does not forbid their joy; but He shews them still higher ground for it. The whole dominion of Satan should be destroyed by His gospel; and as typical of this, He "beheld" or "was beholding" this once bright spirit fall, swift as lightning, from heaven. From eternity indeed He had seen the expulsion of Satan from heaven, and his ever-deepening descent, but the reference rather is to something recently seen. He, as Lord, had absolute power over Satan (or the devil) and all his agents and instruments, and He gives the 70 power or authority to triumph over all his forces too, (See Ps. 91: 13; Mark 16: 17-18, Acts 28: 5). This is an investiture with miraculous power; but, further it means their complete victory in Him over the whole corporation of evil. Satan, whose emblem the serpent is, should be "bruised under their feet," Rom. 16: 20; Gen. 3: 15. Pride and self-seeking might, however, accompany their ascendancy over the spirits: let them rather rejoice in their personal relations to His Father and to Him,—rejoice that "their names" (reference to His—"thy name,"—in v. 17), were in the list of heavenly citizens. (On this list see Ex. 32: 32, Ps. 69: 28, Dan. 12: 1, Phil. 4: 3, Heb. 12: 23, Rev. 3: 5.)

The Lord Himself in that hour rejoiced "in spirit" in the Holy Spirit given to Him without measure—when He contemplated the sovereign goodness and mercy of His Father, and the glorious mediatorial dominion given to Himself. He who does all things according to the counsel of His will, had revealed to child-like faith what the proud philosopher could not see, 1 Cor. 1: 18-31. It is not the "hiding" in itself for which the Lord gives thanks; but that in God's sight it seemed good to reveal to "babes" what the wise failed to see.

The Lord rejoices in His dominion, which embraces all (v. 22). See Matt. 28: 18, Jn. 3: 35, 17: 2. No one knew the son or can reveal Him but the Father; and no one knows the Father and can reveal Him but the Son. He and His Father are one; the Father is in Him and He in the Father.

With affection he privately tells the disciples how great the privileges under the gospel were. Pious men of old, of the greatest eminence ("kings and prophets") had wistfully looked forward to the times of the New Dispensation, ("there may be an affecting reference to the last words of David," 2 Jam. 23: 1-5. See Jn. 8: 54).

To live in this better dispensation is our privilege too. How great the responsibility: how great should be our joy!