

## General Statement.

Soon after the event of the last lesson messengers came from John the Baptist, then in prison at Machærus, near the Dead Sea. They inquired, in the name of their master, whether or not Jesus was the promised Messiah. In answer the Lord showed them his miracles and ministry, and bade them draw their own conclusions. On their departure he delivered a high eulogy of John as the greatest of prophets and the noblest of men. On that day came an invitation from a Pharisee, named Simon, for Jesus to come to supper at his house, which may have been at Nain or at Magdala, on the shore of the Galilean sea. Jesus went, but was treated with scant courtesy. There came in, however, uninvited, a guilty but penitent woman, whose ardent gratitude supplied the host's lack of attention. She approached the sofa where Jesus reclined at table, and over his unsandaled feet wipeth bitter tears of sorrow, wiped them with her long disheveled hair, and broke over them a vase of costly liquid perfume. The Pharisee looked on in scorn, astonished that the Master suffered a thing so vile to approach him, and in his secret heart he doubted whether he was a prophet; no prophet, thought he, could be unacquainted with the character of this woman, and no prophet, knowing her character, would permit her approach. The Lord read his thought, and answered it in a parable, which was a commendation to the sinner and a rebuke for Simon's neglect; and then, careless of the scorn of the assembled company, he declared the woman's sins pardoned, and pronounced upon her the peace of God.

## EXPLANATORY AND PRACTICAL NOTES.

**Verse 36. One of the Pharisees.** A member of the political and churchly party which was most disposed to be self-righteous. This Pharisee's name was Simon. He was probably one of the better class who at the first respected Christ's teachings. John 12, 42; Luke 11, 37. **Sat down to meat.** Rather, reclined on one side. In the early days the Jews ate in the original Oriental style, sitting cross-legged on the floor or on divans. See Gen. 27, 19; 1 Sam. 20, 5, 17; Psa. 128; Sol. Song 1, 12. But the dominant Greek and Roman fashions were at this time followed by the Jews.

**37. In the city.** We are not told what city. A legend early had currency that the city was Magdala, and the woman Mary Magdalene, but there is not a particle of evidence that this was the case. Neither is there any proof that it was not, and the Christian belief "which has been consecrated in so many glorious works of art" cannot easily be obliterated. **A sinner.** A woman of notoriously bad character. **Whom she knew.** In the Orient, street loungers sometimes come into a festal chamber and take their places around the walls, uninvited, but unchallenged. Dr. Trench cites such a case, and in the *Arabian Nights* there are many illustrative incidents of this sort. But this woman came not to see or to be seen, but to meet Jesus. **Alabaster box.** Rather, vase. Very beautiful vases and bottles for perfume were made of alabaster in ancient times. **Ointment.** Perfume.

**38. Behind him.** He was reclining on his left side, his head toward the table, and his feet turned outward. **Weeping.** In uncontrollable sorrow for sin. **Began to wash his feet with tears.** A shower of her tears fell on him. **Did wipe them.** A very natural act, when she found that her tears had wet them. To turn this outburst of remorse and love into a piece of "acting," according to a previous plan, is to rob the incident of all its beauty and helpfulness. **Kissed.** Kissing the feet would be startling now, but the practice was familiar to the ancient heathen, many of whom dwelt among the Jews. **Anointed them.** Gently stroked them with the liquid which she carried in her "alabastron" or alabaster vase.

**39. Within himself.** He thought, but did speak. **If he were a prophet.** This reflection of the Pharisee shows, first, that he had some respect for our Lord as a moral teacher; second, that he, like the woman of Samaria, expected the prophetic character to be manifested in power to read the secrets of men's hearts; third, that he could not believe that a pure character would suffer the slightest contact with one impure. **Manner of woman.** The sinfulness of this woman was a sort of climax in Simon's reasoning; but it was not needed to make it improper for Jesus to talk with

her, according to Pharisaic notions. Some of the rabbis taught that no holy teacher should stand nearer a woman than four cubits; and of six things set down which no rabbi or pupil of the wise should do, one was to speak with a woman. Our Lord in this, as in so many other things, was an innovator.

**40. Jesus answering.** "He heard the Pharisee think," and answered his thought while it was yet unspoken. **Simon.** A very common name in Palestine. **Unto thee.** To every pupil in every one of our classes Jesus is saying to-day what he said in this verse to Simon. (1) *When Jesus speaks it is always unto thee, to the individual, not to the mass.*

**41. A certain creditor.** Money-lender. The creditor here is the Lord God, to whom every man owes his all. **Two debtors.** In this case the woman, who is responsible for many sins; and the Pharisee, whose life was comparatively moral. (2) *The worst and the best stand on the same footing as sinners before God.* (3) *The small sin as well as the great needs forgiveness.* This parable resembles that in Matt. 18, 23-25, but it is only a semblance of machinery and plot, the moral is altogether different. **Five hundred pence.** Perhaps about two hundred and fifty dollars. Dr. Farrar astutely observes that the frequency of our Lord's illustrations from debtors and creditors shows the disturbed and unprosperous condition of the country under Roman and Herodian oppression.

**42. Nothing to pay.** This is the condition of every sinner, great and small. (4) *The moralist is as helpless to save himself as the most iniquitous.* **Frankly.** Freely. (5) *What God bestows he gives without money or price.* **Forgave them both.** Those who confess their sins and cast themselves on God's mercy find a full and free pardon. (6) *Great sinners and small sinners must pass through the same gate and receive salvation in the same way.* (7) *Greatness of sin is no barrier to forgiveness.* **Littlest of sin does not remove the necessity for forgiveness.** **Love him most.** Both ought to love him with all their hearts, but which has the greater cause for gratitude?

**43. Simon answered.** He would not have been a Pharisee had he not answered. And, like all Pharisees, in modern as well as in ancient times, he answered superficially. He had no idea that Jesus had been reading his thoughts. He had spent his life in puerile arguments about duties and ceremonies, and he supposed that Jesus, on his own low level, was simply asking another question of the same sort. **I suppose.** "There is a touch of supercilious patronage, of haughty indifference to the whole matter, in the word he uses."—Farrar.

**44. Turned.** In order to see the woman Jesus was compelled to arise from his recumbent attitude and