Luke - Commentaries by Hamilton Smith

The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, Awakening of Love, The

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In the great scene that takes place in the house of Simon the Pharisee, we see the awakening of love for the Saviour in the heart of a sinner. The Lord, in the perfection of His way, had stooped to grace with His presence the feast which the Pharisee had spread. While sitting at the table an unbidden guest enters, of whom the Lord can say, "she loved much." How, we may ask, was this love awakened in her soul?

There is no question as to the character of the woman. The Spirit of God has described her as "a woman in the city, which was a sinner." Moreover her bad reputation was well known, for Simon is also aware that "she is a sinner." She was a sinner and knew it, and Simon knew it and everyone knew it. Further, she was a burdened sinner, and possibly had heard those wonderful words of the Lord, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Be this as it may, it is beyond question, that she saw in Christ the grace that could bless the undeserving. Thus driven by her need, and drawn by His grace, with the boldness of faith, she enters the Pharisee's house and takes her stand at the feet of Jesus.

The Spirit of God calls attention to the fine scene that follows with a "Behold." He would arrest our attention and have us turn aside and see this great sight – the meeting between the devil's hell-bound sinner and God's heaven-sent Saviour. Doubtless, the onlookers were struck dumb with amazement, as they watched the scene unfolding itself before their eyes. They might well question what would happen. Would the Lord expose her character, condemn her sins and dismiss her from His holy presence? Ah, no! The proud Pharisee may condemn the sinner, to find himself exposed by the Saviour; but the Lord will not condemn a confessed sinner.

The wisdom of His way is as perfect as the grace of His heart. At first no word is spoken. The guests are silent in wonder, the Lord is silent in grace, the woman is silent in sorrow. No sound breaks the silence but the sobs of a weeping sinner. If, however, nothing is said, much takes place, for the sinner's heart was broken and the sinner's heart was won. She "stood at His feet behind Him weeping" and she "kissed" His feet. The tears tell of a heart that is broken, and the kisses of a heart that is won.

What was it that broke her heart, and won her heart? Was it not that she saw something of the grace and holiness of the Saviour, and in the light of His glory she realized, as never before, the sinfulness of her life and her heart, and this broke her heart? But more, she realized that though she was a sinner full of sin, yet He was a Saviour full of grace for one who was full of sin. She found herself in the presence of One who knew her vile life through and through, and yet loved her, and this won her heart.

Good for each one, if we, too, have been in His presence, burdened and wretched by reason of our sins, there to discover that in Him we have found One who knows the worst about us and yet loves us. Thus to have love for Christ awakened in our souls, as we sing,

The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, Brokenhearted Widow, The

The story of the brokenhearted widow reminds us that over the fairest scenes of this world there lies the dark shadow of death. Nain means "pleasant," and the situation of the city was beautiful, but death was there. Then for our comfort we learn that into this world of death the Lord of life had come, and not alone with power to raise the dead, but with the love and sympathy that can feel for us in our sorrows, dry our tears, and heal the brokenhearted. So "it came to pass" that Jesus went into the city of Nain and "His disciples went with Him and much people." This company with the Lord of life in the midst, meets another company with a dead body in the midst; for, as the Lord came nigh to the city, "a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her." How beautiful is the way the Lord takes to heal her broken heart. Moved with compassion, He first dries her tears, and then removes the cause of her sorrow. Had we the power we should probably have first raised the dead, and then said to the woman, "Weep no more." But Jesus takes another way – a better way – that makes the story so full of comfort for us all. He first says to the brokenhearted mother, "Weep not," and then He raises the dead. Thus the woman would have been able to say, "In my great sorrow He came so near to me, that He wiped away my tears. He not only took me out of my sorrowful circumstances, but He walked beside me in them." Thus He shows by His compassion and sympathy that He can wipe away our tears, before He raises our dead. This suits our case, for Jesus is gone, and He does not yet raise our loved ones when taken from us; but He speaks comfort to our broken hearts, and dries our tears, while we wait for the day when He will raise our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus. His compassions go before His mercies. We have the comfort of His love while we wait for the display of His resurrection power. Then indeed, that word will be fulfilled, "God shall wipe away all tears ... and there shall be no more death."

The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, Brokenhearted Sinner, The

In the touching scene that took place in Simon the Pharisee's house, we are permitted to gaze upon that most wonderful sight – a meeting between the Saviour and the sinner. A poor woman who was known in the city as a sinner – and therefore we may conclude a fallen woman – had heard of Jesus. She had heard the people saying that Jesus was "a Friend of publicans and sinners." She had probably heard, from His own lips, that gracious invitation, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Weary of her terrible life, with a conscience burdened with her sins, without a friend in the world, she hears of Jesus, the Son of God. She hears that He is the Friend of sinners and that He bids her come.

Driven by her need, and drawn by His grace, she comes to Jesus; and in this fine scene we are permitted to see the result of a sinner coming to the Saviour. She felt that, at all cost, she must get into the presence of this wonderful Saviour. So she enters the Pharisee's house and goes straight to the feet of Jesus. At first no word is spoken, but two things happen, for we read, "She stood at His feet behind Him weeping," and she "kissed His feet." Those tears tell of a heart that is broken; those kisses, of a heart that is won.

What was it that broke her heart? What was it that won her heart? Was it not that she saw her life, with all its sins, in the presence of His heart with all its love and grace? She discovered that His grace was greater than her sins, and that though He knew the worst about her, yet He loved her, and did not drive her away or utter one word of reproach. She could hold out against the scorn of men, and the sneers of the Pharisee, but such love as this broke her heart. It is not the badness of man, but the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

Having broken her heart by His grace He binds up her heart with His words of love, for, He says, "Thy sins are forgiven. ... Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (vss. 48-50).

The way of this brokenhearted woman is still the way of blessing for any poor sinner.

Firstly, we are made conscious of our sins and need.

Secondly, God in His grace brings us the good news of the only One who can meet our need. We hear of the Saviour who came into the world to save sinners, who has given Himself a ransom for all, and offered Himself without spot to God, and so satisfied God by His mighty work on the cross, that God can proclaim forgiveness to a world of sinners, and invite whosoever will to believe in Jesus.

Thirdly, we learn, that believing in Him, we may know on the authority of God's word that our sins are forgiven and our souls saved (Acts 11:20-21; 10:43).

Blessed moment when, having learned our need and heard of Jesus, we believe and turn to Him, to find ourselves alone in His presence, conscious of our sins, but realizing that, in spite of knowing all our sins, He loves us. Such love will break our hearts and win them forever.

The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, Brokenhearted Saint, The

We have looked at a brokenhearted sinner in the house of Simon the Pharisee; now we are permitted to see a brokenhearted backslider in the house of the high priest. We may truly have our sins forgiven, and love the Lord with all the ardor and sincerity of the Apostle Peter, and yet, but for the grace of the Lord, we may, like the Apostle, break down and deny the Lord. Through storm and sunshine this devoted servant had followed hard after his Master during the years of His wonderful ministry; but there comes a day when he "followed afar off." Walking at a distance from his Master he is soon found in the company of the enemies of his Master. So we read that when the enemies of the Lord "had kindled a fire" and "were set down together," that "Peter sat down among them." Sitting among the Lord's enemies it is not long before he enters into temptation. It seemed, indeed, only a small temptation for it comes from "a certain maid." Alas! away from the Lord, in bad association, a very little thing is sufficient to trip us up. The maid may be weak enough, but she has poor Peter at an advantage, for she saw him "as he sat by the fire." All she says is, "This man was also with Him." Peter scents danger, so without hesitation, the man who in his self-confidence had said, "I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death," flatly denies the Lord, saying, "Woman, I know Him not."

Three times he denies the Lord, and then, according to the words of the Lord, "the cock crew." Peter has denied the Lord; but has the Lord's heart changed toward Peter? Blessed be His Name, His love is an unchanging love; "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." So it came to pass, that at the very moment when Peter turned from the Lord, the Lord turned to Peter, for we read, "the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." We may grieve His heart but we cannot change His love. We may be sure that that look was a look of infinite love that seemed to say to Peter, "You have denied Me, Peter; you have said that you do not know Me, but in spite of all your denials I love you."

What was the effect of that look? It broke the heart of the poor backsliding Peter; for we read, "Peter went out, and wept bitterly." Like the fallen sinner of Luke 7, the backsliding saint of Luke 22 sees his sins in the light of the Lord's love; and the love that rose above his sins broke his heart.

We know, too, on the resurrection day, the tender way love took to heal this brokenhearted man and drive away his tears. So in all our backslidings, He restores our souls, by breaking our hearts and winning our hearts with His unchanging love.

The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, Brokenhearted Saviour, The

We have seen that our sins, and our backslidings, seen in the light of His love can break our hearts, and that death can cast its shadow over the fairest scene and break our hearts. But in this touching scene on the Mount of Olives we see a yet deeper sorrow – the sorrow of unrequited love. We at times may have our hearts broken by unrequited love, but, even as the Saviour's love rises above all other loves, so, when His love is flung back in His face, He feels, in measure beyond all others, the sorrow of unrequited love. The depth of His sorrow can only be measured by the height of His love.

So we read, "When He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it." His love had been lavished on these poor people, but they only rewarded Him evil for good, and hatred for His love (Psa. 109:5). When He told them that He had come to heal the brokenhearted, they were "filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city" (Luke 4). When He forgave sins, they charged Him with blasphemy (Luke 5). When He healed a poor cripple, they were filled with madness (Luke 6). When He received poor sinners, and ate with them, they said He was a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber (Luke 7). When He goes to raise a dead girl, they laugh Him to scorn (Luke 8). When He delivers a man from the devil, they say, "He casteth out devils by Beelzebub, the chief of devils" (Luke 11).

They opened their mouths against Him, they spoke against Him with a lying tongue, and fought against Him without cause, and for His love they were His enemies (Psa. 109:2-5). Nevertheless, man's heartless treatment drew forth no expression of indignation from Christ, no bitter and revengeful word fell from His lips. When He was reviled, He reviled not again, and when He suffered, He threatened not. The hardness of our hearts only called forth a sorrow that found expression in His tears. We broke His heart at last, for He could say, "I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me." And having broken His heart we sought to "slay the broken in heart" (Psa. 109:16,22). So we read, "the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy Him." What a scene! Outside the city, the heartbroken Saviour weeping over sinners: inside, hardened sinners seeking to destroy the Saviour – seeking to shed the blood of the One who shed His tears over them.

In yet a little while there will be a glorious answer to those tears, for very soon He will be surrounded by a great host of broken-hearted sinners saved by grace and backsliding saints restored by grace, in a scene where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4). Then "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. 53:11).

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted."

The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, One Thing Is Needful

Passing to the touching scene at Bethany, we find two devoted women, of whom one lacked the "one thing" needful, while the other chose "that good part."

Martha, like the rich young man of Mark 10, was characterized by much that was excellent. The house at Bethany, apparently, belonged to her, and she willingly opened her home to receive the Lord of glory. Then, not only was she hospitable, but she was a busy servant in the service of the Lord. There are "many things" to be done for the Lord in this world, and Martha was occupied with these "many things." Nevertheless, with all these excellencies she had overlooked "one thing" and she has to learn that the "one thing" she had overlooked, is the "one thing needful." In result, she was cumbered with service, irritated with her sister, and complaining before the Lord. How truly Martha represents that large class of Christians who, unconsciously to themselves, make their particular service their great object rather than the Lord Himself. Such would engage all others as helpers in their special service, and are irritated if left "to serve alone." Lacking the "one thing," they are careful and troubled about "many things."

How right and happy to put our homes and means at the disposal of the Lord, and to be occupied in His blessed service; and yet this scene warns us that it is possible for these activities to be first in our thoughts and affections, rather than the Lord Himself. If this is so, we lack the "one thing" needful – the single-hearted devotedness that puts Christ before all service.

Of Mary we read, she chose the "good part," and that "good part" was part with Christ. For her Christ was the supreme Object before all else, whether possessions, or service, or her sister. Having Christ as her one Object she escaped the restlessness, the care and trouble that marked her zealous sister. While Martha was "cumbered about much serving," Mary was calmly sitting at the feet of Jesus. When Martha came to the Lord with her complaining word, Mary "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word."

We are not left to form our spiritual judgment as to the differences between these two sisters, for we are plainly told that the Lord reproved Martha and commended Mary.

In making the Lord her Object, Mary had chosen the "good part" which will not be taken from her. Very soon we shall leave all earthly possessions; in yet a little, service and toil will be past, but forever and ever Christ will be the Portion and Object of our souls. Mary chose the eternal portion in time; she made Him her one great Object, and chose above all else to sit in His company. Other things may be taken away, but this will not be taken away. For as she chose to be with Him in time, so will she be with Him for all eternity.

Does then, this better choice – this "one thing needful" – mean that Mary neglected service for the Lord? Scripture not only rebukes such a thought, but clearly shows that she not only served the Lord, but her service was stamped with the Lord's approval in a way that is unique above all other service before or since. Here the Lord says, "Mary hath chosen that good part." In the fine scene of Matthew 26, the Lord says, "she hath wrought a good work upon Me." The one who chose the "good part," in due season does the "good work".

So high is the Lord's approval of this good work, that He says, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matt. 26:10-13).

Let us then remember that the "good part" must precede the "good work." Only as Christ is our one Object will service, and all else, fall into its rightful place.

The Lord Is My Shepherd and Other Papers, Maintenance of Love, The

We have seen how love for Christ is awakened, and blessed indeed when at the outset of the Christian life the heart is won for Christ. We have now to learn how the heart, in which love has been awakened, can be maintained in the freshness of first love.

Do we not all know that, with the passing of time, many things may creep in between the soul and Christ? Not always gross things, which indeed might arrest the soul by the very wretchedness they bring, but things that are small and apparently harmless—"the little foxes, that spoil the vines," and render the life unfruitful. The allowance of these little things will cast a chill over the affections, and gradually form an icy crust over the heart, and the Lord has to say to us, "Thou hast left thy first love." Thus from one cause and another we often see, while love to Christ has been truly awakened in souls, some make little progress in spiritual intelligence whereas others grow in deeper acquaintance with

the Lord and His mind. How, then, is the love, that has been awakened, to be maintained?

Will not the home at Bethany supply the answer? In the two sisters we have two saints in whom love to Christ has been truly awakened; yet in one sister we see a believer growing in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, while in the other sister we see a saint who is hindered by self and hampered by her service.

Martha's love was shown by seeking to meet the physical necessities of the Lord as a Man. Mary's love was seen in seeking to gratify the deep longings of His heart by hearing His word.

Martha was occupied with the "many things" which all have their end in death. Mary was occupied with the "one thing" that death could not take from her. One has said, "No attention, even to Himself in the flesh, though it were from one that loved Him and whom He loved, could replace this. The 'many things' end only in disappointment and death, instead of leading into life eternal, as did the words of Jesus, issuing from a heart broken that it might let forth the stream of life."

If, then, we would know how love is awakened, we must in spirit visit the home of Simon; but would we know how love is maintained, let us visit the house at Bethany. Standing at the feet of the Saviour, in the house of Simon, love was awakened in the heart of a sinner; sitting at the feet of the Master, in the home of Martha, love was maintained. At His feet we are in His company; in His company we hear His words, and His words declare His heart. There we are learners in the school of love. How much do we know of the good part chosen by Mary – the turning aside from the busy round of life, and the activities of service to be alone with Jesus, and more, to draw nigh to Jesus for the love of being near Him? The Lord loves our company; He delights to have us in His presence. He may dispense with our busy service, but He cannot do without ourselves. Thus only will first love be maintained, and if lost regained. We cannot live on the past. Past experiences may have awakened love, but only present communion can maintain love.

At His Feet, At His Feet as a Learner

If, as sinners, we have been at the feet of the Saviour discovering that, in spite of all our sins, He loves us and has died for us, then, if we are to make spiritual progress – if we are to be "meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" – the "one thing needful," as believers, is to take our place at His feet and hear His word.

This plain but important truth is brought before us in the homely scene described in the five closing verses of the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke. Journeying on His way to Jerusalem, we are told that the Lord came to a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. She gladly opened her home to the Lord, and at once set herself to minister to His bodily needs. This indeed was right and beautiful in its place; and yet the story clearly shows that there was much of self in Martha's service. She did not like to have all the burden of this service, and felt grieved that she was left to serve alone. There was one thing lacking in her service.

The one thing needful – the one thing that Martha missed – was to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His word. She loved the Lord, and with all her energy she zealously set herself to serve the Lord; but her zeal was not according to knowledge. She set herself to work without having first been in the company of the Lord, and in communion with the Lord, and therefore without being instructed in the mind of the Lord through the word of the Lord. As a result she was "distracted with much serving" (JND), was "careful and troubled about many things," complaining about her sister, and even entertaining the thought that the Lord was indifferent to her labors.

Alas! do we not, at times, act like Martha? We may take up service according to our own thoughts, or under the direction of others. From morning to night we may busy ourselves in a continual round of activity, and yet neglect the one thing needful – to be alone with the Lord and, in communion with Him, hear His word and learn His mind. Little wonder that we get "distracted," "troubled about many things," and complain of others. How true it is that it is easier to spend whole days in a round of busy service, than half an hour alone with Jesus.

In Mary we see a believer who chose the "good part." Sometimes it is said that Mary chose the better part, as if Martha's part was good, but Mary's was better. It is not thus that the Lord speaks. He definitely says that Mary's part was "that good part," for she chose the "one thing needful" – to sit at His feet and hear His word.

Clearly, then, Mary had a keener perception of the desires of the heart of Christ than her sister. One has said, "Martha's eye saw His weariness, and would give to Him: Mary's faith apprehended His fullness, and would draw from Him."

Martha thought of the Lord only as One who was requiring something from us; Mary discerned that, beyond all the service of which He is so worthy, the desire of His heart, and the great purpose of His coming into this world, was to communicate something to us. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," and, at the end of His path He could say, "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me" (John 17). By the word of God salvation is brought to us (Acts 13:26); by the word of God we are born again (1 Peter 1:23); by the word of God we are cleansed from defilement (John 15:3); by the word of God we are sanctified (John 17:17); and by the word of God we are instructed in all the truth of God "that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

May we not say that Martha set herself to do good works without having been thoroughly furnished by the word of God? In Mary we learn that communion with Christ and instruction in the word of Christ must precede all service that is acceptable to Christ. He delights that, in His own time and way, we should minister to Him; but, above all, He delights to have us in His company that He may minister to us.

Mary chose this good part and the Lord will not allow any complaints by her sister to belittle her choice – it shall not be taken from her. So, again, in the last days of the church's history on earth, the Lord commends the Philadelphians, not for any great activity that would give them a prominent place before the world, but that they had "kept His word." Like Mary of old they set greater store on His word than their works. It is not, indeed, that Mary was without works, for having chosen "that good part," in due time the Lord commends her for doing "a good work" (Matt. 26:10). So with the Philadelphian saints, the Lord who commended them for keeping His word, is the One who can say "I know thy works."

Of old, Moses could say of the Lord, "Yea, He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand: and they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words" (Deut. 33:3). This presents a lovely picture of the true position of God's people – held in the hand of the Lord, sitting at the feet of the Lord, and listening to the words of the Lord – secure in His hand, at rest at His feet, and learning His mind. May we, then, choose this good part, and, in due course, do the good work.

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