

Luke - Commentaries by Alan Yerkey

Simon's House - Luke 7:36-50: With an Introduction to Parallelisms, Simon's House-Luke 7:36-50 (7:36-50)

There is a beautiful booklet by J. N. Darby titled, *The Sufferings of Christ*. In it, brother Darby brings out just a few of the sufferings as found within the Book of Psalms, illustrating both the sufferings that we are able to enter into with Him, and those which only Christ could bear. However, as he has also stated, the Psalms are not the only book where we may find Christ's sufferings given to us. One of my favorites is a beautiful account given of Jesus dining at the house of Simon the Pharisee, where we have not only an incredible teaching of God's love given in grace and forgiveness, but which also extends itself in illustration to one of His children entering into the sufferings of His Son — and His Son standing in defense of His child thereby.

Parallelisms

First some formalities: Many believers are aware of what is known as parallelisms existing within Scripture. However, not so many are aware that there are three basic types of parallelisms, each with its own basic construction, and that all three of these may be present within a single passage. Sometimes, the ideas or teachings being presented are given in what is referred to as a chiasmus (or, chiasm), at other times they may be of a more linear or straight-line progression, or even still, they may be found in what can be defined as a step-progression parallelism.

A chiasm may also be referred to as "ring" composition or an inverted parallelism. This is where the subject presented returns to the idea with which it first began by moving in basically a circular format of ideas or relations within the text. It is not about the linear progression of thought, but a greater development of the truth or subject that was first presented — the climax of which is found within the center or heart of the chiasm. Part of what is found in one line, is also used to make up the next, both in leading up to and in following after the climax. Parallelisms constructed in this manner follow a basic pattern similar to that of AB CC BA or as ABC D CBA (each line of thought given is in direct answer [either of complement or contrast] to its opposite within the chiasm; John 1:1-2 is an example of a chiasm).

When found of linear or straight-line sequence, the parallelism(s) which appear are usually found of an AA BB CC DD, and so on, pattern (with two lines of thought given in parallel to each other in each grouping). This is of perfect example in our text of verses 44b-46, as to Simon's failure and the woman's service.

In example of step-progression parallelism, ABC ABC (A answers to A, B to B, and so on), a simple example within the New Testament can be found in the immediate chapter previous to our passage of topic. In Luke 6, verses 46-49 form a step-progression parallelism that gives a parallel contrast in linear thought of what happens to each house that is built:

(Preface) And why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not what I say?

A. Every one coming to Me and hearing My words and does them, I will show you to whom he is like:

B. He is like a man building a house, who dug and went deep, and laid the foundation on the rock;

C. But a great flood having come, the stream breaking powerfully against the house couldn't shake it, for it had been founded upon the rock.

A. And he that has heard and not done,

B. is like a man who having built a house on the earth without a foundation,

C. On which the stream broke, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.

The climax in this is not found of the last line in the dialogue, but occurs more fully in both lines represented by the letter C. This is just a simple, yet quick, illustration of one of the many step-progression parallelisms that exist throughout scripture (Isa.28:15a & 18, form a step-progression, and contains both of the other types of parallelisms at its core).

Though some may teach that parallelisms of this fashion are unique to the Hebrew language, it is not true. Various forms of parallelisms, including certain of the styles outlined here, can be found in ancient writings from around the world: whether Russian, Sanskrit, Coptic, Chinese, or that of both Classical and Koinē Greek, there are many languages where parallel structures can be found besides Hebrew (Homer's *Odyssey* [Classical Greek] has such constructions). This is because of the way in which our ancestors both thought and how they related the things happening around them through oral tradition, as being able to write was both a rare and costly skill.

Consider a group of people sitting around a table. I could whisper something into the ear of the person on the left of me, requesting they pass it on to the person to their left in the same manner, and so on around the table. Unfortunately, the odds of what had been shared with the first person being the same as what then gets whispered into my ear by the person on my right, is slim to none. If, however, I use some form of a memory device to assist in the recall as I tell the story, the chances of the story being recalled the same are dramatically increased. For example, I continue to remember the names of the Great Lakes today, not because of repetition in saying their names, but by the fact that my teacher once "whispered" to me that she had many HOMES on the shores of the Great Lakes: (HOMES) Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior. Just as we continue today to try and find ways to increase the way we both learn and remember things, using associative mnemonics and whatever other techniques we can find, parallelisms were used by our ancestors for the same purpose the world over.

How this relates to our subject is two-fold: First, that the Holy Spirit, and not simply any mere man, is responsible in continuing to use these forms in revealing God's mind to us, we would be negligent in our study of Scripture to ignore them other than in innocent ignorance in not having previous knowledge of their existence. Second, all of the sentence structure and punctuation that we now take for granted, was not a part of the original manuscripts, and neither did the chapter or verse notations exist.

When the Testaments were written, the letters which made up each word were all strung together from one side of the page to the other, without even a space given to separate one word from another — or to distinguish one sentence from another. It was not until around the fourth-century that the chapter breaks entered into Scripture; while the current verse structure did not come about until the sixteenth-century. While some may otherwise not see any purpose in recognizing the parallel structures, choosing simply to rely upon the current verse/chapter notation instead, taking knowledge of them on even a superficial level can often open a passage to us in ways that we have never considered before. Understanding a bit of the language's form and construction, as well as its written grammatical style, then, can help a person in their reading in better discovering where the true breaks within each passage or thought should come (as there are numerous passages within the current chapter/verse notation that prematurely end with a chapter break, and verses that are split between each other where they should not). This is not to say that we must search out every form and occurrence of the various parallelisms found within Scripture in pursuit to discover where we may have previously been in error, but that we should be aware of their existence and basic construction, and when they are either pointed out or otherwise made known to us, we should seek to understand and accept all that the Spirit would have for us from them as He brings it before us.

Luke 7:36-50

First, let us do a quick outline of the parallel patterns within the passage before us. The length of the passage is presented in the form of a chiasm, with a second embedded chiasm included within the first few verses, an encased parable at its center (the climax), as well as an in-line progression as preface to its conclusion. Please consider that not only does Jesus' entrance into the city of Nain, and all the miracles and teachings performed there offer a preface to this encounter, but that verses 34-35 are even more directly related in both Simon's judgment of both Jesus and the woman, and the expression of what is meant of God's wisdom and the children it produces.

- A. The introduction of those involved: Simon the Pharisee, Jesus, and a "woman of the city" (vss. 36-37);
- B. The invitation and outpouring of the woman's love towards Jesus through her acts of courtesy and compassion (vss. 37b-38)
 - 1. perfume brought
 - 2. stand at the feet
 - 3. let down the hair
 - 3. use the hair
 - 2. kiss the feet
 - 1. perfume used to anoint.
- C. Simon's false and critical judgment (vs. 39)
- D. An encased parable: the climatic teaching/rebuke (vss. 40-42)
- C. Simon's right judgment and able witness of his conscious (vs. 43);
- B. Reflection upon and defense of the woman's actions in light to those of Simon's (series of six in-line parallelisms that follow the pattern:
 - 1. Simon's failure at this
 - 2. the woman's provision in its absence; and so on (vss. 44-46)
- A. The conclusion: testimony of the woman having already been forgiven by the exercise of faith and her having peace therein (vss.47-50).

The Customs of the Day

In the Middle-East of Jesus' day, anytime a person of means would put on a feast, especially in hosting an important guest, the custom was that the doors to their house would be open prior to the feast. The poor and needy, or the normally unacknowledged within society, could then come in and line the inner wall, where they would be fed with "crumbs from the table" at the end of the meal. This is part of what is illustrated in Lazarus' desire in being laid outside the gate of the rich man's home (Luke 16:19-21). The reason for this custom wasn't so much in truth to the host's genuine care for the needy, but was more as a show of his supposed generosity and nobility in opening his home to provide a meal to the outcasts who would otherwise have little or nothing.

Of our account here in Luke, we have not simply a teaching on God's grace and forgiveness, but we have it given to us in relation to Simon's failure at providing even the simplest of courtesies dictated by the customs of the day — not to the poor, but to his supposed guest of honor. It is important for us to see this as it is, which should only be seen as being deliberate for the purpose of insult, as no-one with good intentions would invite someone as their guest of honor and then 'accidentally' forget to even greet them with the most basic of courtesies when they got there. With this intentional insult however, we are given the witness of Wisdom's children not simply in the acts brought about in witness to the woman's salvation, but in her witnessing and entering into a small part of Christ's sufferings.² Even more, what many often miss, is that the need in recognizing and accepting the forgiveness directly spoken of in being freely granted, isn't to the woman, but to

Simon.

As the passage begins, we are introduced to those making up the focus of the events as they unfold. In verses 36-37, what is meant in that Jesus had “sat down to meat” and “when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house,” does not mean that at the same instant the woman found out where Jesus was meant to be a guest, that He was already there. It is more to the point that when she had learned that Jesus had accepted the invitation to be a guest at Simon’s house, she made ready and went to meet Him there. Both the KJV and the NT, along with certain others, make this unclear.

The Greek of the passage confirms that, both the woman’s knowledge and actions in “having known He was to lie at table” and “having taken (or, having brought) the ointment (myrrh), her presence was already in being within the room before Jesus had entered. Though various translations imply that His action in lying at the table is previous to her knowledge of it, it is actually written in looking back of future intent. Even in considering the difference of words used within the remaining Greek manuscripts, either *anakeimai* or *katakeitai* (345 or 2621) is used as to recline (vs. 37), which are both of future action. The present aspect of what we are being given does not come into the picture until the woman’s actions in what she does with the ointment, and that of Jesus’ own words in testimony of her presence there that she “from the time I came in has not ceased in kissing My feet:” (vs. 45) — implicit to the fact she was already there.

Observing the custom of the day, the woman had gone to Simon’s house immediately prior to the dinner and entered, just as all the other outcasts would have had access to do, and sat or stood along the inside wall of the feast room. At the appointed time for the meal to commence, the host would greet each of the invited guest as they entered: a kiss would be given, usually upon the face (similar to what is still observed in many cultures today); once seated upon a stool beside one of the couches (or, triclinium — a broad, U-shaped form), water and olive oil would be brought for the guests to wash and anoint themselves with. If the guest was one held of high esteem, the host may offer a token of his personal favor to his guest by anointing him with a more expensive form of ointment other than olive oil. After the basic courtesies were observed, grace would be said and they would all then recline for the meal and discussion. No grace would be permitted to be offered, and no meal had, without the washing first being accomplished — hence, Simon’s actions further testimony to an ulterior motive in having asked Jesus to be his guest.

When Jesus and the other invited guests had arrived, those already within the room would be witness to all that transpires in the greetings by the host. The woman, as well as those most directly known of Jesus’ continued affection and recognition in His ministering (the poor and needy present within the room), would have witnessed Simon’s deliberate injury in the public humiliation suffered to Him. The man that Simon was, a Pharisee of some means, was all about custom — all about law and tradition — to deny the most basic of customs to anyone was nothing without purpose.

Simon’s Intent

So, what was Simon’s intent? By the phrasing of the Greek in his invitation in using the expression *erōtāō de* (2065, 1161), and as witnessed by his actions, he thought nothing special of the Lord, but addressed Him as merely an equal. Simon rejected the “counsel of God” against himself; he refused repentance and John’s baptism — and he acknowledged nothing of Christ’s miracles or teachings as evidence of His Person or authority. At best, Simon saw Jesus as but a young teacher needing to be tested, and corrected, to set Him on the proper course. Yet, if this was only the case, why the insult?

In the immediate passage before us, we can find perhaps a greater hint of Simon’s intent in what he had spoken within himself, “This man, if He were a prophet...” (vs. 39; cf. vs.16), in the doubts and animosity he obviously held against Jesus. Certainly, Jesus’ reputation went before Him — a reputation that was both an insult and a threat to Pharisaical rule and life (vss. 17-34; cf. John 11:47-48). But while certain of Simon’s intent may have been to ‘examine’ Jesus, much more seems of purpose in the attempt to humiliate and possibly to discredit Him before those to whom His message was having the greatest impact — those the Pharisees otherwise sat in judgment and control over.

Simon had presumably thought himself to be someone within the community, and may have been one of influence. It was a great honor to host a guest held in high regards by others — for someone to host a person considered to be a great teacher, later rabbinical writings would consider it as “partaking of the Divine presence.” With these things considered, to deliberately insult and humiliate someone thought of in this manner, even to the ‘common folk’, would be an attempt to destroy His influence and reputation as being nothing — it would be a direct attempt to lower His esteem in their eyes by showing them that to those who ‘truly’ matter, the religious elite, He is nothing.

The Woman’s Presence

In consideration of this is the question, Why was the woman there in the first place? While there is certain to be varied opinions as to this, I hope to show one as based more fully as to what I see of the scripture itself. Though I fully agree with many who present it being God’s act of grace in leading the woman in her actions (as with all of us throughout our walk), I do not see it as a person who had no previous understanding or possession of forgiveness prior to coming. Undoubtedly, in the woman having heard and witnessed all that Jesus had taught and did in her home town, even possibly of His reputation of all that He had done throughout the region (vss.16-17), her actions were in some degree or another a result of the forgiveness she had heard offered and felt that in some form or another she already possessed. She may not have had full certainty as to the effect in having full peace over what all that exactly entailed, but she possessed some aspect of it in her having been led there to begin with.

Some have suggested that the provision of the myrrh she brought was as simple as that of an offering in seeking Jesus’ favor in wanting to possess the certainty of all that she had heard of Him for herself; or, even, in simply seeking to do something good in kind to the One whom she has only witnessed good from. But even more likely, as I find within the text by the principle action exemplified of love, there was truly a sense of forgiveness felt and possessed by the woman in her intent in having gone to Simon’s, and that being simply to anoint the Man she had come to know as Lord.

It is obvious in the text that her having the myrrh with her was not an accident — she had brought it with her toward the intent that Jesus could be anointed with it after having washed. Without the assumption that there was at least some form of forgiveness understood and

possessed by her, her actions make little sense in having gone there to begin with. Yes, she was being led by the Lord's grace the entire time, but there is no reason or threat against the Spirit and His operations to think that she had come as she did in possession of Christ's forgiveness prior to hearing its full confirmation towards her from His own lips. Hers was not only a true act of faith, but a true example of faith being walked out in spite of the possible threats she could face in doing so.

In seeing Jesus' deliberate humiliation, her tears could only flow in love towards a Man who preached grace and forgiveness; One Who did nothing but heal and preach repentance and glad-tidings towards all. However, her tears were not of any form of joy for any type of feeling of forgiveness received that she may have felt, nor were they of grief over her own sins, but they were of seeing her Lord so publicly mistreated. There seems to be no other purpose for her tears, and in their presence, she is then given to provide all of the courtesies that were previously and purposely denied, and of a greater degree of witness than if everything would have had proceeded according to custom without the insult having been made.

Love as Evidence

"We love Him because He first loved us..." "To whom much has been forgiven, the same loves much." The statement in the KJV, "for she loved much" (vs.47), is not in reference to her many sins of 'love' in her presumably having been a prostitute, as I have heard many present. Her "much love" is of her actions in entering into Jesus' reproach and suffering, feeling His grief in Simon's insult towards Him, and in spite of the possible risks she faced in doing so. This, if I may insist, could only flow from a heart in which Divine forgiveness has already found a place from which to flow back to Him in love.

The Greek expression, *charin* (5484), is typically translated as 'on account of; because of; for the sake of' and is found in numerous places throughout scripture. However, in the passage under discussion, in verse 47, it is preceded by *ou* (3756), a negative particle, which then would render the translation, "Not because of ..." — it both negates and assigns a directly opposite sense (like the English prefix *un-* or *non-*). A more appropriate rendering would perhaps be given as, "Not on account of this [grace — her service to Him in providing what Simon had lacked], I say to you, her many sins have already been forgiven,³ but because of her much love." Her actions were a testament of the forgiveness she had already possessed and are the exact answer Simon himself gave to Jesus' parable and question of verses 40-43. (I should note further, that Jesus' address to Simon in both verses 40 and 44: "Simon, I have somewhat to say to you..." and "Seest thou this woman..." are emphatic statements equal in thought to were this to be of modern English in its origin, "Simon, listen up!" and "Look upon this woman!" would better carry the emotion of the transaction.)

Women had little rights in the first century, especially among the Jews, where they were often counted of less value than cattle (many Rabbis writing within the Babylonian Talmud of such comparisons to a woman's worth). The threat to the woman in the actions she took are numerable: ranging from public ostracism and disgrace, being cast out of the synagogue, to stoning. Though not directly stated within the text, the act of letting down her hair in public was considered a disgrace for a woman to do — if she were married, it would be cause enough for her husband to divorce her and leave her with no alimony. If she were single, it would be considered provocation for sexual relations — whether a prostitute advertising her 'wares' or a woman mistakenly perceived as such and forcefully taken (with little to no recourse). Either way, it would have been highly unlikely that her hair would have already been down, and the woman's actions in having taken it down to use it as she did in lieu of attempting to ask Simon for a towel (which would be a threat to her host in pointing out his inadequacy), is a testament to her willingness to suffer greater reproach for her Lord (also representative of a bridal act).

A woman was not to speak to a man in public, not even a wife to her husband; nor was a husband to speak to his wife in the company of others — in either instance, one or both could be kicked out of the synagogue and accused of seeking sexual favors (cf. John 4:27). The woman having touched Him, in the eyes of Simon and his compatriots, was completely unacceptable. For Jesus to then even address the woman in public, was for Him to possibly face further humiliation and insult from His host — especially in light to His not making any form of objection to her actions.

If anything, Simon's simplest expectation would have been for Jesus to rebuke the woman and order that she be removed. It is certain that he did not imagine to have Jesus defend her actions in any way, especially in an insult to himself in calling him out over his own lack of courtesy and false intent. In Jesus' recognition and defense of the woman however, we have a direct instance of our Lord Himself standing beside one of His brethren (sisters) during her own suffering on His behalf. He takes upon Himself not only the ridicule she would have faced alone from each person there who had witnessed her actions, but brings the focus of hostility fully back upon Himself.

First, in speaking on forgiveness as Jesus did in His parable of the two debtors, it is implied that not only is God Himself meant as the creditor, but that the forgiveness extended was one already given towards each and evidenced of possession by the love expressed in return. In then confirming the truth of His parable in the illustration of the woman's actions being evidence of her love in response to the forgiveness she had already possessed of Him, and His direct statement of forgiveness, He declares Himself God — taking the full weight of protest Simon or the others could have made against the woman onto Himself in speaking what was to them a blasphemous claim.

"Thy sins are forgiven" (vs. 48), is written in the perfect tense: it is not in the present tense that they were being forgiven, but that they already had been — with nothing else necessary. If, as Jesus had presented in His parable, "...which of them will love him most," that love is predicated upon not only having been forgiven, but upon the depth of forgiveness they received, than the illustration of the woman's "much love" as evidence through her actions is also evidence of her already knowing and possessing His forgiveness in a practical manner — just as Simon's lack of love is a recognition he holds that he has none, as he refused God's testimony and witness against himself.

The woman never asked the Lord for forgiveness; never had the opportunity to do so in our account being presented, it was something she already understood herself to possess from the ministry she had previously witnessed of Him. She simply came to offer an expression of the love she felt towards Him, and a very expensive one at that. Grace drew her in love, before Simon and his 'feast' were even a subject. Yet as with each of us, though we may 'understand' we are forgiven, and that we are given to have peace with God, it is not often that we fully apprehend these and feel the full effects of their truth until we are drawn into a situation where Christ Himself makes them real to us in our suffering reproach with Him.

The climax of this account is not of Simon's bad actions, nor even is it of the woman's love — it is the forgiveness freely offered and complete by the Creditor, by God, irrespective of any actions or merit of those to whom it is towards. It is the verses making up the encased parable at its center that are the heart, and they ask the basic question in light to each individual's understanding and apprehension of both their own sin, and that of God's grace towards them: who will love Him more?4

I hope that this brief introduction of parallelisms as found in this passage of Luke has been of some use. Whenever I used to read this account of a day in Jesus' life, I would always get side-tracked in focusing upon the actions of the woman and in thinking that they somehow had something to do with 'meriting' Jesus' statement towards her. But I also knew this was an incorrect assumption, as it implied that His forgiveness and peace could somehow be earned. It wasn't until I had begun to meditate upon the parable at its center, that we are all debtors and God Himself the creditor wholly and freely offering His forgiveness, that I realized the fuller meaning. To see the woman's actions as what they truly are, in her entering into the sufferings of her Lord, is to draw strength in knowing that by doing so, we also have His peace as He stands beside us in our own sufferings as well.

Waiting Upon the Lord, Waiting Upon the Lord (10:38-42)

One of the most humble statements that I have heard in recent years was from a self-confessed "babe" in Christ: "Just about everyone I meet new to Christianity wants to be a pastor or an evangelist. It seems that everybody today feels called to the ministry for some great purpose, few simply want to sit at the feet of Jesus or wait upon others in their need."

Focused Upon the Lord

Luke 10:38-42—Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, focused upon her Lord and all that He had for her of Himself; Martha was distracted. It was not because of the need of her service that was the distraction, but by Martha's service taking her focus off of the Lord in all she felt was necessary to be done.

To be "cumbered about much serving" (KJV) is for a believer to be in their own way—and that of the Lord's in what "good part" He would have for us at the time. It is to be distracted, anxious, even agitated in thought as to everything a believer sees as being necessary for them to do, or to where (or, what) they feel their faith should be ("thou art careful [merimnao, 3309] and troubled [turbazo, 5182] about many things"). As such, we keep ourselves from our presence before the Lord in being dependent upon Him in seeking His mind and will for us.

Instead of our focus being upon Him, at our place at His feet in prayer, worship and learning, we obsess over our work and service as being what's important. Some of us even to imply that without OUR service, the Lord would somehow be held-up or prevented in His will and purpose towards others. In contrast to this however, of the Greek word turbazo previously noted, is the idea in context of disturbing or disrupting what truly the Lord would have had done at the time.

True, what actually needs to be done must be done: a believer cannot say "be warm and filled," to someone who has neither clothing nor food and ignore providing for their needs. But the purpose in helping others is not simply for the need of the service or work performed, but of the love of Christ and in testimony to Him according to His mind and heart. It is to be Christ's love and will working through us and not simply to be that of a task performed and our own identity therewith (Jas. 2:14-26; John 15:2).

In the Lord's Presence But Not Listening

Through certain examples we are given of various failures among the disciples within the Gospels, we have a resounding lesson: they were in the Lord's presence, but often without fully seeking the Lord's will and mind with the patience to either listen or wait. They often were abrupt, even brash, in their assumptions as to what it was to be concerning the Lord, His ministry, and their place within it (Mark 8:27-38; 10:35-45; Luke 9:51-56).

The twelve disciples had all been chosen and called out from the others (the seventy). Even among the twelve, there were yet three called out for an even greater revelation of their Lord. They enjoyed a place of privilege and closeness greater than that of the other disciples at the time. Yet, even in the closeness and privilege held, they fared no better in standing against Satan when their eyes were turned from the Lord back onto themselves and all that they either thought as to their own ministry or what they desired for themselves. Yes, they are beloved of the Lord and of all the saints which have since lived; but they were also men, given both through their strengths and their weaknesses as an example for us from whom to learn. They were men, who were each in his own way at one time or another, until the Lord brought them away to Him in a more personal manner (Mark 6:30, 37-44, 47-52; 8:1-9, 14-21; 9:2-8, 17-29, 33-42; John 13:6-11; 21:3-21).

Old Man Saul - New Man Paul

But there is another example as well: an apostle whom some may or may not think of in this context.

"Circumcised the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church, touching the righteousness of the law, blameless" (Phil. 3:5-6).

Saul was one in his own way; busy about doing what he felt was necessary to be within God's will. "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they be men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2) —in the Apostle's own words:

"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my

voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly [enraged] against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

“Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (Acts 26:9-15).

Christ called Saul to be a new man, Paul: called him out from his own way and made him to be the Apostle to the Nations. All that Saul thought was necessary to be done had kept him from the truth of what actually was needed, until Jesus Himself intervened and created a new man in him—Paul.¹

This may seem an extreme comparison to some, as Saul was a non-believer at the time that he had persecuted Jesus. But are we not acting in the same vein when we go along under our own willful desire in insisting upon what we feel called to or that which we seek of our own interests? It is not necessarily that we don't pray enough for the Lord's will or guidance over something, but it is our actual need to wait upon Him for His direction in order to be certain that what we seek is of Him.

Saul was “blameless” as to the righteousness of the law that he was able to ‘touch’. Yet it was neither God's righteousness nor life, but his own, in operating under the assumption of being within God's will in what he thought was right. It was all of Saul. His heritage had given him claim to all of God's promises, God's Word, and accordingly, what Saul thought was God's will in persecuting the church in his own understanding of the Scriptures.

Because he was not in communion with God, however, not simply in failing to seek His direction, but in not heeding His word of prophecy in the coming Messiah and His purposes, Saul was acting fully within his flesh and for his own glory (Rom. 9:4-5; Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:4). Sadly, there are many yet walking about in the same spirit and haughtiness of Saul.

The Rich Young Ruler: The Necessity of Self-renunciation

There are even certain similarities with this to that of the rich young ruler, however, but in a different context and with a different result—drawing from the account given in Mark's Gospel (10:17-22).

Just because we may be owned of Him, or that of some portion of our service be recognized, does not mean that it is either of His mind or heart for us what it is we seek. This is the same as to our way in going about to accomplish it. In considering the rich young ruler, that though he was thoroughly searched in what was true as to his observance of the law, he still was found lacking as to what was truly necessary to be within the mind and will of God. Yes, he was as the unsaved at the time of this meeting, but there is more for us here, and that an important lesson for us.

There are those things naturally occurring within a person's ability that are rightfully recognized and commendable in their place, and the same is true of any necessary service one can accomplish in His name—no matter how simple or small it may seem. In part, the rich young ruler was not lacking in the keeping of the commandments as given by the Lord (Mark 9:38-41; 10:19).

That the Lord “looked upon him, and loved him,” is not a simple thing to dismiss. It is that He “searched him thoroughly,” as only He could, and in love knew the things he had answered as true.² However, to lose sight of the eternal weight of things, whether for us in witnessing that of the gospel, or in the purpose of the ministry and service which is rendered, there is danger to both ourselves and that of the soul of another.³

Unlike Paul, who fully submitted to the Lord's glory, the rich young ruler turned back in sorrow. Though he was once certain that he would be able within himself to do all that Jesus would require of him, he was turned about in refusal of the necessity of self-renunciation that only comes about in holding ourselves crucified in Him. The young man was righteous in himself and held all that he possessed as his witness to that fact—it was, in short, the man's very identity. Jesus sought for him the righteousness of God, and his identity as being found in Him.⁴ This is at the heart of waiting upon Him. It is the heart in fully recognizing His purchase of us, and more, the intimacy of the relationship we are now in and our responsibility to Him. It is that we are one in the Beloved.

Wanting His Will to Be Our Will

When we already know that we are out of communion with the Lord due to sin, it is a simple matter of our conscience in testimony against us which brings us before the Father in confession and ownership of the grace we have been given in our presence before Him in Christ. But it is not simply in the application of His Word to our conscience, it must also be of application within our emotions and our desires. Without this latter application, we can often become blinded to the truth of what we seek.

Sometimes when we want something so desperately to be His will and we are unable to see how it could not be otherwise, we often find ourselves blinded to what His true will is. This is most often due to our desire being greater than our patience and willingness to wait until a definitive answer comes. It is not so much as a blatantly open sin, but more so offensive as a hidden one of an impatient spirit or of a selfish intent.

When our proposed willingness to accept that His answer may actually be in the negative becomes eclipsed by the joy we would feel over what good we believe would come if our prayer was affirmed according to our desire, we often end up in haste in operation in the flesh as to our desire. Self becomes the ruling factor in our decision: our place before Him in waiting is sacrificed for immediate gratification.

Even if the service or ministry would be a blessing to those it is directly towards, as Martha's in making dinner, it could be at the cost of something greater for all. It is truly of a presumptuous spirit to think that simply by presenting something in prayer, we then have the right to act along a course we would have chosen for ourselves anyway, as being of the Lord's mind for us.

Yes, there is great liberty in service on behalf of our merciful Savior. We are to wait however, even perhaps bringing the question before Him as to if what we are seeking the answer to is of our flesh and personal desire, or if it is what He would truly have of and for us. We must know Him through His Word and in tune with His Spirit in the revelation thereof, in worship, prayer, and in thankfulness in dependence and praise, then faithfully act as to the mind He gives.

How We Wait Upon Him

Christ has our purpose and is our life. We cannot minister to others in truth and of genuine purpose without at the same time being before our Lord seeking His mind and His heart in everything we do. It is meant for us of a continual presence before Him even in the midst of the service or work performed. In other words, it is a relationship of submission and dependence, with lives of progression in the purity of our walk in direct relation to our increasing apprehension (understanding and possession) of our place before Him at all times—as even in the heavenlies at this present time and place (Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 3:1-3).

It is at His feet and in His presence (in the closet, at His table, among the saints, or in ambassadorial service), where we learn in privilege from Jesus of all which He is, who He is, and all that He has already done and will yet accomplish. It is how we wait upon Him. In personal worship, prayer, praise and thankfulness, in study of His Word, in fellowship, worship and study within His family, the greater our fellowship and desire is to be like Him. All of which we are and have becomes focused on Jesus. The ministry that He would have of us, both within His body and in the world around us, is then more fully of His design, and of His use and purpose.

“That Good Part”

That Mary had chosen “that good part” which would not be taken from her, is not just as to her place at that time. It is also in regards to both the testimony she would later have and the love for which she served Him, even in not running to her brother’s grave, but to be before Jesus, at His feet in her sorrow and in full expression of her confidence and dependence in and upon her Lord. Mary looked not to herself, neither what she had or thought to do. She patiently looked for and to her Lord: she waited upon Him.⁵

Too many people have the idea that some form of professional ministry automatically outweighs, or is more important than simply living a life of faith. However, the most powerful and practical ministry that one can have is how they live daily before others as before the Lord. In truth, there is no genuine good to any form of ministry where the Lord has neither gone before, nor where the life of the person in ministry contradicts the truths we are supposed to uphold. As many have said before, “Preach the Gospel! If necessary, use words.”

Let us be consumed with our Lord, continually walking in His presence throughout the day with a heart of worship and thankfulness, and a will instant in prayer to discover and to hold His will in action to His desire in what He alone would give as necessary in our lives. Let us receive of Him all which He has for us to know and do. Even more, to be within His presence in love for the privilege of drawing near to the One who has given His all to bring us unto Himself and our Father.

If it becomes necessary that a reproof is given by Him to correct us upon our path, whether as the still, small voice as to Elijah, “What doest thou here?” or, as a gentle statement in witness as to Jonah, “Doest thou well to be angry?” or even of the Glory that met Saul along the path of further destruction, let us not answer with our own interests at heart, but with a heart for Christ as which was formed in Paul, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

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