

THE WELCOME VISITOR

A Sermon Published on Thursday, June 3rd, 1915.

Delivered by C.H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

"And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary, her sister, secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him. Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him. The Jews which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."—John 11:28-32

It seems that Martha had heard of Christ's coming, and Mary had not. Hence Martha rose up hastily and went to meet the Master, while Mary sat still in the house. From this we gather that genuine believers may, through some unexplained cause, be at the same time in very different states of mind. Martha may have heard of the Lord and seen the Lord; and Mary, an equally loving heart, not having known of his presence, may, therefore, have missed the privilege of fellowship with him. Who shall say that Martha was better than Mary? Who shall censure the one, or approve the other? Now, beloved, you may be tonight yourselves, though true believers in Jesus, in different conditions. I may have a Martha here whose happiness it is to be in rapt fellowship with Christ. You have gone to him already and told him of your grief: you may have heard his answer to your story, and you may have been able by faith to say, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world"; and you may be full of peace and full of joy. On the other hand, sitting near you may be a person equally gracious as yourself who can get no farther than the cry, "Oh! that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!" Dear Martha, condemn not Mary. Dear Mary, condemn not yourself. Martha, be ready to speak the word of comfort to Mary. Mary, be ready to receive that word of comfort, and, in obedience to it, to rise up quickly and, in imitation of your sister, go and cast yourself, as she has done already, at the Saviour's feet. I must not say, because I have not all the joy my brother has, that I am no true child of God. Children are equally children in your household, though one be little and the other be full grown, and they are equally dear to you, though one be sick and the other in good health--though one be quick at his letters and another be but a dull scholar. The love of Christ is not measured out to us according to our conditions or attainments. He loves us irrespective of all these. Jesus loved Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus. He loves all his own, and they must not judge of him by what they feel, nor measure his love by a sense of their own want of love.

Hoping that the Lord will now bless the word to all of us who are his own people, I shall speak of two things--a visit from the Master--a visit to the Master.

I. HERE IS A VISIT FROM THE MASTER.

Martha came and said to Mary, "The Master is come"—or as we might read it truly, "The Master is here and calleth for thee." "The Master is come." "The Master is here."

Beloved friends who are just now without the present fellowship with Christ, which you could fondly desire, permit me to whisper this in your ear. "The Master is here! The Master is here!" We cannot come round and whisper it secretly as Martha did, but take the message each one of you to himself—"The Master is here."

He is here, for he is accustomed to be where his word is preached with sincerity of heart. He is accustomed to be wherever his saints are gathered together in his name. We have his own dear word for this—the best pledge we can have—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." We have met in his name, we have met for his worship, we have met to preach his gospel; and the Master is here. We are sure he is here, for he always keeps his word; he never fails of his promise.

He is here, for some of us feel his presence. Had Mary said to Martha, "How do you know that the Master is come?" she would have answered, "Why I have spoken with him, and he has spoken to me." Well, there are some among us who can say, "He has spoken to us." Did we not hear him speaking when we were singing that hymn just now?

"My God, the spring of all my joys,
The life of my delights,
The glory of my brightest days,
The comfort of my nights."

Did not we perceive him to be near some of us, when we were singing:

"Oh! see how Jesus trusts himself
Unto our childish love,
As though, by his free ways with us,
Our earnestness to prove"?

I, for one, did, if none besides; I can bear good witness to you that are languishing for his company, "The Master is here."

And mark, he is here none the less surely because you have not, as yet, found it out, for a fact does not depend upon our cognizance of it, though our comfort may be materially affected thereby. The Master was at Bethany, though Mary had not heard an inkling of the good tidings; there she sat, her eyes red with weeping, and her whole soul in the grave with her brother Lazarus. Yet Jesus was there for all that. Make the case your own; though you may have come here troubled with all the weeks' cares—though while you have been sitting here the thought of something that will happen tomorrow has been depressing you—though some bodily weakness has been holding you down when you would lift up your spirit towards God, yet that does not alter the fact. "The Master is come; the Master is here." Oh! there was Mary sighing, "If only Christ had been here! Oh! if only Christ would come!" And there he was! And perhaps you are saying, "Oh! that he were near me!" He is near you now. You sigh for what you have, and pine for that which is near you. You think not, like Mary Magdalene, that he standeth in this garden. You are asking, "Where have ye laid him?" While your joy and comfort seem to you dead, he, whose absence you mourn, stands present before you. Oh! that he would but open those eyes of yours, or rather than he would open your heart, by saying to you, "Mary!" Let him but speak one word right home to you personally, and you will answer with gladness, "Rabboni!" The Master is come here, though you as yet have not perceived him.

That word "The Master" has a sweet ring about it. He is the Master. He that is come is earth's Master. What are your cares? He can relieve them. What are your troubles? He can overcome them, and sweep them out of the way. The Master has come. "Cast thy burden on the Lord: he will sustain thee." He is hell's Master. Art thou beset with fierce temptations and foul insinuations of the archfiend? The Master has come. Oh! lift thy head, thou captive daughter of Zion, for thy bands are broken. The Breaker is come up before them; their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them. He who hath come is no menial servant, but the right royal Master himself. The Master is come. What though your heart now seems cold as a stone, and your spirit is cast down within you? What though death hath set up its adamant throne in thy breast? The Master has come, and his presence can thaw the ice, dissolve the rock, bring thee all the graces of the Spirit and all the blessings of heaven that thy soul can possibly require. "The Master is come"—does not that touch your soul and fire your passions? Whose Master is he but your own? And what a Master! No taskmaster, no slave's master, but such a Master that his absolute sovereignty inspires you with sweetest confidence; for he binds you with the bonds of love, and draws you with the cords of a man. Master indeed is he! Aye, Lord and sole Master of your soul's inmost core if you be what you profess to be; the Master whose scepter is the scepter of reed which he carried in his hand when he was made a scorn and scoffing for you; the Master whose crown is the crown of thorns which he wore for your sins when he accomplished your redemption. Your Master. Thou shalt call him no more Baali, but Ishi shall his name be called. He is only Master in that same sense in which the tender loving husband is the master of the house. Love makes him supreme, for he is Master in the art of love, and, therefore, Master of our loving hearts. How sweetly doth "my Master" sound! "My Master." Why, if nothing else might bestir us to get up and run to meet him, it should be the sound of that blessed word, "The Master is here: the Master has come."

But Martha added—and it is a very weighty addition (may the Holy Ghost make application of it to your heart)—"and calleth for thee." "But is that true?" says one; "doth he call for me?" Dear brother, dear sister, I know that if I say he does I shall not speak without his warrant, for when he comes into a congregation he calls for all his own. He speaketh, and he saith to all whom he loves, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." I know he does, because love always delights in fellowship with the object that is loved. Jesus loved you or ever the earth was. His delights were with the sons of men from old eternity. He loved you so well that he could not keep in heaven without you, and he came here to seek you and to save you. And now it gives his heart joy to be near you. He said, "Let me hear thy voice; let me see thy face: for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." I tell you it is Christ's nether heaven to hear the voices of his people. It is that for which he left heaven--that he might give them voices with which to praise him. Do you think he loved you so, and will live without you? Nay, he calls for you.

What is his Word, indeed, all through, but a call to his own beloved to come to him? What are Sabbath-days but calls in which he says, "Come away! Come away, my beloved, from the noise and turmoil of the city, and come into the quiet places where my sheep lie down and feed"? What are your troubles but calls to you in which, with somewhat of harshness as it seems to you, but with an inner depth of love, he says, "Away, my beloved, from all earthly delights, to find thy all in me"? What is the

Communion of the Lord's Supper but another call to you, "Come unto me"? The bread which you shall eat, and the wine which you shall drink, these are for yourself, and the call which is encompassed by them as by symbols is for each one of you. The Master is here, and calleth for thee--for each one. "Oh!" saith Mary, "but my eyes are bleared with weeping." He calleth for thee, thou red-eyed sorrower. "Ay, but my heart is heavy with a sad affliction." He calleth for thee, thou burdened sufferer. "Ay, but I have been full of levity all the week, and have forgotten him." He calleth thee that he may cleanse thee yet again. "Ah! but I have denied him." What saith he but, "Go, and tell my disciples, and Peter"? He calleth for thee that he may forgive thee yet again, and may say unto thee, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" I care not who you are, if you are one of his, the Master is come and calleth for thee. "Why," says one, "no Christian has spoken to me for a long while." But the Master calleth for thee. "But I seem so solitary in this great metropolis, and though I know my Master, I do not know any of his people." Never mind his people: "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." Ay, but I think if I am one of his I must be at the very tail-end of the catalogue, and the last of all." He calleth for thee--for thee. Oh! may that word now come home, and may each one feel, "If he calls for me, there is such condescension in that call, such tender memories of my weakness, such consideration for my distance and my forgetfulness, that I will loiter no longer. Is the Master come? Lo, I am ready for him. Doth the Master call? Lo, my spirit answers, 'Come, Master, my heart's doors are flung wide open. Come and sit on the throne of my heart. Enter in and sup with me and I with thee, and make this a gladsome season of intimate fellowship between my soul and her Lord.'"

Turning now to our second part, let us talk awhile of:

II. A VISIT TO THE MASTER.

It follows on the first as a fit sequence. We never come to Christ till Christ comes to us. "Draw me: I will run after thee." That is the order. It is not, "We will run after thee: Lord, draw us." Neither is it thus. When a soul is saying, as we sung in the hymn just now:

"If thou hast drawn a thousand times,
Oh! draw me yet again,"

Then, beloved, he is drawing us. When we are praying to be drawn, we are being drawn all the while.

In answer to the Lord's visit, you will notice the conduct of Mary. She rose up quickly. She bestirred herself. Oh! let each one of our souls now say, "Has the Lord called for me? Why, then, should I loiter or linger for a single moment? I will get me up this very moment; I will say, 'My Lord, I am come to thee. Thou hast called me, and here I am.'" Oh! for grace to shake off the sorrow that makes some hearts sit still! Mary's dear brother was newly laid in the tomb, but she rose up quickly to go and meet her Master. Dear mother, forget for a few minutes that dear unburied child still in the house. Forget awhile, dear husband, that sick wife of yours towards whom your heart so naturally flies. Forget, beloved, just now, all that you have suffered, all that you expect to suffer, all that you have lost or may be losing. The Master is come, and calleth for thee. Rise up quickly. Let not these things constrain thee to inactivity of spirit, but rise up now, and by his grace come away from them. She bestirred herself; she put on her best efforts, that she might not tarry when he called. And then she went, we find, just as she was. She rose up quickly, it is said, and she went: she came unto him. No sooner said than done. She arose

and she came. Well, but should not she have washed her face? Tears add but little beauty to the maiden's visage. And that hair of hers, I doubt not all disheveled—might she not have arranged that a little, and prepared her dress, and made herself trim for the Lord? Ah! that is a temptation for the mass of us: "I cannot expect to have fellowship at the table, because I have not come prepared." Brother, you ought to have come prepared, but, at the same time, if you have not, rise up quickly and come to the Master as you are. The Master had seen Mary with tears before, for he had felt her tears upon his feet. He had seen her with disheveled hair before, for she had wiped his feet with the hairs of her head. If you are out of order, it is not the first time Christ has seen you so. I do not think a mother's love depends upon seeing her child in its Sunday clothes. She has seen it, I warrant you, in many a trim in which she would not wish anybody else to see it, but she has loved it nonetheless. Come, then, thou unprepared one. Come to him who knows just what thou art, and in what state thou art, and he will not cast thee out; only make brave to believe that, when Christ calls, his call is a warrant to come, however unfit we may be. And oh! how promptly she left all other comforters to come to Christ. There were the Jews that came to comfort her. I dare say they did their best, but she did not stop for the rabbi to finish his fine discourse, or for the first scholar of the Sanhedrin to complete that dainty parable by which he hoped to charm her ear and assuage her sorrow. She went straight away to the Master there and then. So would I have you forget that there are other comforters: forget your joys as well as your grief: leave all for him, and let your soul be only taken up with that Great Master of yours who calls for you, for all your faculties, for all your emotions, for all your passions, for your entire self. Come right away, by his help, from everything else that would absorb any part of your being. Rise up, and draw near to him.

But it seems, beloved, that when Mary had reached the Master's feet she had done all she could, for it is said that she fell at his feet. Ah! you remember she had knelt once at his feet when she washed his feet: she had sat once at his feet, when she heard his words; this time she fell at his feet. She could neither kneel to do him service, nor sit to pay him the reverence of a disciple. She fell all but in a swoon, life gone from her. She fell at his feet. Never mind, if you are at his feet, if you do but fall there. Oh! to die there--it were life itself! Once get to Jesus, and you may say, like Joab at the altar when Benaiah said, "Come away, for Solomon has sent me to slay thee." "Nay," said Joab, "but I will die here"; and at the horns of the altar there he died. And if we must die, we will die there at his feet. Fall down at his feet. Beloved, if you do not feel you have got strength for communion tonight, never mind: it does not want any.

"Oh! for this no strength have I:
My strength is at his feet to lie."

Some of us do know what it is to be scarcely able to get together two consecutive thoughts--not to be able to master a text or lay hold of a promise; still we could say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him"; we could lie down at the feet that were pierced, and feel how sweet it is to swoon at the Saviour's feet. Only get there. Let your will and heart be good to get at him now, for the Master is here, and calls for you. Come, though in the coming you should utterly fail to get enjoyment, come and fall at his feet. Do I hear any of you saying, "An! but I have a heavy thought pressing at my heart, and if I come to him it is not much that I can say in his honour. I feel but little love, and gratitude, and joy. I could not pour out sweet spikenard from the broken box of my

heart." Be it so, only pour out what you have; for what did Mary do? She said—and the Master did not chide her, though he might have done—"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Oh! it was half cruel, for she seemed to say, "Why wast thou not here?" It was unbelieving in part, and yet there is a deal of faith in it—a sweet clinging to him. Martha had the same; and it shows how often those two sisters had said to one another, "Would God the Master was here." When the brother was very sick and near to death, they were saying to one another, "Oh! if we could get the Master here!" That had been the great thought with them, so they pour it out. Beloved, when you are at Jesus' feet, if you have an unbelieving thought, if you have something that half chides him, pour out your heart like water before the Lord:

"Let us be simple with him then—
Not backward, stiff, and cold;
As though our Bethlehem could be
What Sinai was of old."

Tell him the weakness; tell him the suspicion; tell him all the sin that has been, and all the sin that is haunting you. Tell it all to him; and at his feet is the place to tell it. You will be eased of your burden then. Beloved, you know how Mary received consolation. It was a great day for her when she got to Christ's feet, and then the Master began to do wondrously, and very soon Lazarus was restored. So now, your first business, my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, is to get to Jesus. "Oh! but Lazarus is dead." Never mind Lazarus. You get to Jesus and he will see to Lazarus. "Oh! but my business fails me." Never mind the business just now. Get to Jesus. "Oh! but there is sickness in my house." Leave the sickness for a while now. The one thing is to get to Jesus and to his feet. "Oh! but my own heart is now as it should be." Forget thine own heart, too, and remember Jesus; he is to thee all that thou canst need. He is made, of God, unto thee, "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption"; and do thou come to him quickly, and thou shalt have all thou wantest. "Ah!" says one, "I cannot bear to think of God, for I do not love him." "Ah!" says another, "but I can bear to think of him, for though I did not love him, he loved me." And now you may say, "I cannot bear to think of coming to Jesus, for I do not love him as I should." Ah! but think of him, for he loves thee. His grace to thee is boundless. Now let thine own self be put aside awhile, and remember this "faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus has come into the world to save sinners." Come, then, in the strength of that!

I must close by saying a few words to those whom hitherto I have not addressed. Perhaps there are some here to whom this message has never come—"The Master is come and calleth for thee." If it were to reach them tonight, it would be the first time they ever heard it. O dear heart, I pray it may come to you, that this may be the beginning of days with you. The Master has come. This is certain. From the highest throne in glory to the manger, to the cross, and to the grave, the Master has come. That he calls for thee, this is also certain, I think. Let me give you a text in which, I think, he calls for you. "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." "Whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved." Calls he not for you, too, in this text, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon"? Calls he not for you in this verse, where he bids all that labour and are heavy-laden come unto him, that they may rest; or in that other, "Come now, let us reason

together, saith the Lord. Though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as snow." He calleth for thee. Do not disbelieve him. It is certainly matchless grace, but he is a God and none is like unto him. "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his thoughts above your thoughts." But does your heart say, "Why, if I thought Jesus called for me, I would come"? Then he does call thee; that speech of thine, "I would come," proves it; 'tis he that makes thee feel willing. Dost thou long for him? Oh! he is putting his hand in at the door of thy heart, and making thy bowels yearn for him. Does a tear drop on the floor, and do you say, "It cannot be that such a one as I should ever live and be saved, and be Christ's"? Why, thy very admiration at his grace shows that some of his grace is at work upon thee. Trust thou that that arm can save: trust thou that that pierced hand can grasp thee; trust thou that that heart that was gashed with a spear can feel for thee. Trust thyself wholly to him. "Go thy way; thy sins which are many are forgiven thee." If thou hast trusted him, thou art saved. Come and cast thyself at Jesu's feet tonight. Is there no young man here to whom this shall be Christ's voice? You say you cannot believe, and cannot repent, and cannot do anything. Then fall like dead at Jesu's feet, and look up to him—to him alone, and you shall have life. Is there no young woman here burdened in heart, to whom the Saviour's feet may become a place of refuge from all her fear? I trust there is. And if I speak to someone far advanced in years, who imagines that he, at least, must be given up by mercy, it is not so. Thou hast but a few days more to live, but the Master calleth for thee. Rise up quickly! May tonight witness thy forsaking of thy sins, and thy clinging to his cross; and one day thou shalt see his face in heaven without a veil between.

The Lord bless you, beloved, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Biblical Studies Ministries International, Inc. regards this sermon to be in the public domain. OCR was done by Kathy Stewart. Reformatting was done by Joanne Kimble. www.bsmi.org