

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart **Lesson 9. Offerings of Gratitude**

From time to time, Jesus warmly commended the faith of various individuals whom He healed. But His commendation of Mary sets the crowning seal of perfection to His growing definition of faith.

He had said to the coldhearted Simon, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much” (Luke 7:47). Clearly, Mary *loved* much because she knew she had been *forgiven* much.

She probably felt, however, as many since have felt, that she yet wanted faith. This simple, contrite love she knew—what good would it be if she knew not that greater virtue of faith which alone could get something done, like moving mountains? Imagine her surprise to hear Jesus assign His own definition to her experience of contrite love, as He told her, “Thy *faith* hath saved thee; go in peace” (vs. 50). She had a precious possession: genuine “faith.” But what is it?

A picture is worth a thousand words. Faith is the essence of true Christian experience. Righteousness is only by faith, “not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9).

But we must distinguish genuine faith from its counterfeit if we are ever to know peace of heart. Jesus lifts up Mary’s heart-response to His delivering her from her “seven devils” as being what the Christian wants: the “picture” of faith. Mary’s story makes it easy for us to understand. The picture is worth more than many thousands of words.

Faith is simply a heart-appreciation of the *agape* love that led the Son of God to die for us on His cross. That faith is what Mary had.

From her first contact with the Savior, she had begun opening her heart for the Holy Spirit to “pour” in that *agape*. She couldn’t receive much at first, but day by day her capacity began to grow.

In His first contact with her in Magdala, Jesus gave expression to that *agape*, perhaps not in words, but in look, in touch, in spirit, in the fervency of His prayer for her deliverance. She was almost totally gone, but a tiny remnant of soul was still within her that responded with that tiny spark of appreciation. Thereafter, with each succeeding prayer during the following six sessions, her appreciation of His *agape* grew.

What motivated her thereafter was not fear of hell, not hope of reward, not love of heaven, not desire for praise from others, but a totally non-egocentric appreciation for

“the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love [*agape*] of Christ which passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3:18,19).

She experienced the reality of the delightful process stated in Romans 5:5: “Hope does not disappoint, because the love [*agape*] of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (*New American Standard Bible*). Starting with an empty heart, the *agape* fills it like you fill a wine jug! And once the heart is filled, it all flows to others as easily and naturally as it flowed in from the heart of Jesus.

It’s not that you try and try to behave like Jesus; “behold,” see, comprehend the reality that was in His heart; sense what it cost Him to save you; then the same behavior flows out from your own heart. Like watching a game at the arena, we behold this drama unfold unconsciously in Mary. She is a demonstration of how a sinner is saved.

What is the link between the love of Christ and the faith of Mary? When she broke the alabaster flask of precious ointment to anoint Jesus, she was giving a lesson to the world. She showed that same spirit of sacrifice which Jesus’ life and death exemplified. Mary’s act has special meaning for us as an illustration of what led Him to His cross.

Her act at Bethany stands out alone in history as the most beautiful, heart-touching deed ever performed by a repentant sinner. It was closely involved with the outworking of the great controversy between Christ and Satan because it was welcome evidence to Jesus and to the watching universe that Satan’s grand contention was wrong: *humanity is indeed capable of attaining a heart-appreciation of the sacrifice Jesus made.*

Mary had no righteousness of her own; but her Savior’s righteousness had been *imparted* to her, to become now an integral element of her character. She welcomed it. It was not merely legally *imputed*; it had found *lodging* in her soul. As Job long before had proved Satan wrong when he demonstrated that someone could serve God for no reward, so now Mary makes a magnificent demonstration, but not realizing her role.

She demonstrates the power implicit in a commitment. She burns all bridges behind her; from now on she has given herself to the Savior, everything laid on the altar of Christ. Paul said, “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). Henceforth she has no problem with “obedience.” It’s not just outward acts; it’s heart.

Did she help Jesus? Imagine how her noble deed cheered the heart of the Savior in His darkest hours when He hung on His cross! No angel from heaven could have brought Him the comfort which the memory of her tearful sacrifice gave Him. In her sacrificial faith directed to Him He discerned a pledge of His eventual joy. The travail of His soul will purchase for Him a precious reward—the making of *many* righteous through “faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6; Isa. 53:11).

Christ’s death on the cross satisfied the legal demands of the atonement. Fine. Theologians can wrangle over it endlessly. But the evoking of such repentant love *in*

human hearts is what changes lives. It gives the Savior a reward for His expenditure of Himself.

Yes, “God commanded” that the “most precious [1888] message” go to the world; and Jesus said clearly that wherever the gospel is preached “throughout the whole world,” Mary Magdalene’s story must be included (Mark 14:9). The joy of Jesus was in proclaiming this Good News and watching people’s eyes light up. That joy will be yours, too.

—*Paul E. Penno*

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

https://youtu.be/D9_of4YyKUA

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