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"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1:16.

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The Jarvis Street Pulpit

"IT WAS THAT MARY"

A Sermon by the Pastor, Dr. T. T. Shields

Preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Sunday Evening, March 29th, 1936

(Stenographically Reported)

"(It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)"—John 11:2.

This verse is a parenthesis: it is not an essential part of the story, but an explanatory note written for the purpose of identification. "Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha." Then comes this striking and significant passage of identification. Which Mary of the many? ("It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.")

The gospel of John was written long years after the events therein described. The writer probably had present in his view all that is herein recorded, as he penned the first verse. The sickness of Lazarus in Bethany occurred some time before the event to which reference is made in this verse. It was some time after his sickness that Mary anointed the Saviour's feet with ointment. But she is here identified. Bethany was the town of Mary and Martha. And it is said, "It was that Mary": not some other Mary. There were many Marys then as there have been ever since. Thus this writer, by the Holy Ghost, distinguishes the particular Mary, who was the sister of Lazarus, as "that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment."

There are many characters in Scripture, who were remarkable for some one action or event in their life, and by which they were distinguished from all others. The apostle Peter, great as he was, nobly as he wrought in the later years, is always remembered by that one sad lapse when he denied his Lord. The name of Judas recalls at once his act of treachery in denying the Lord. But he was not the only Judas. There were others of the same name. One was a godly man, who is specifically identified as one other than the traitor: "Judas, not Iscariot". In God's appraisal of character there is no mistake in His books. There is no confusion of names. "The son of perdition" can never be mistaken for a disciple nor a disciple for a betrayer: "Judas, not Iscariot." The names of Ananias and Sapphira are

synonymous with the most flagrant untruthfulness. So I might call the roll of many others who were distinguished throughout their whole life by some one conspicuous action.

And there was something to the credit of this woman, Mary, that distinguished her from all others. No other person ever did exactly what this Mary did: "It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick."

As we look at this parenthetical word this evening, we may well enquire whether there is any distinguishing nobility of character or conduct by which we may be identified. Is there any good thing that can be written to our credit which would enable one writing of us to say: "That is the man who did that noble act"? Or, "That is the woman whose incomparable unselfishness differentiated her from all her contemporaries"? It was that Mary who did what others failed to do. Let us look at her record as it appears first of all in this chapter.

I.

Mary is first introduced to us as A WOMAN WHO HAD HAD A GREAT SORROW. It would appear that Mary and Martha and Lazarus were peculiarly attached to each other. You have seen some families which were aggregations of units, rather than a real association of compatible and congenial spirits. I have seen such families, the members of which seemed to have nothing in common with each other. They bore the same name, but there appeared to be no mutual affection. They each went their own way as though they had no relation to each other. And we have all known other families like this of Bethany, where the members seemed to be bound together with a tie of indissoluble affection. They seemed to share each others' joys and sorrows. The family was a unit, they were all one. Such was the family at Bethany. When sickness entered that family it plunged the others into great sorrow. Martha and Mary were profoundly concerned.

That is a very commonplace thing, is it not? And yet it is a real difficulty when sickness comes. It is not a matter to be regarded lightly, especially when beyond it all a dark shadow is threatening a closer approach, and there seems the possibility of a fatal issue of all the pain. It is the common lot of mankind, I know. It is not at all unusual; but it is not any more easily borne because other people have it as well as ourselves. Such affliction is often a greater trial to those who are well than to those who are ill.

What wonder, then, that these two women should have *prayed!* I have known some mothers who had a calendar all their own. If you asked them about certain events they would say: "Let me see. Oh, yes; I can tell you when it was. It was in such a year. Johnny was about three years old, and that was the year he had the whooping cough", or scarlet fever, or something else. In that mother's memory the years of her family history are marked by domestic emergencies, by illnesses and other troubles which followed in harrowing succession. You smile at that, but it was not felt to be a light affliction while it had to be endured, week after week, and perhaps, in some cases, month after month. And some of us learned in such experiences, as did those women, how to pray. These women dispatched someone post haste for the Master. Instinctively they turned to Him. That was their first thought, as soon as they recognized that the hand of disease was upon their beloved brother. They sent to Jesus saying, "Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick."

We, too, have often sent for Him have we not? We have bowed the knee and told Him we were in dire trouble, and we could see no other way out of it but for Him to come. You remember when you prayed with a new earnestness, a new urgency, in the presence of a potential disaster. What can we do in such hours of human impotence, but cry mightily to God?

But Jesus did not come; several days passed and Lazarus waxed worse and worse. I can fancy his sisters often went to the door, and perhaps even sent someone along the road to see if there were any sign of His near approach, only to receive the disappointing news that there was no sign of His coming—no answer whatever to their prayers.

Have you not been in that position, when you had prayed, and prayed again; when you had shut yourself up to God, and cast yourself entirely upon Him? And there was no response to your cry. Yes, and His absence and continued silence exposed you to the assaults of unbelief, and you began to wonder why He did not come. Perhaps only a suggestion of a doubt entered your mind, yet you dared to ask, "Is it any use to pray? After all my praying, He does not come!"

But, my dear friends, I have seen greater disasters than that. Sicknesses of the body are sad enough. But that is nothing like a moral distemper, nothing like the sorrow that comes to the heart of a sister, or mother, or wife, when someone is going on the road that leads to destruction; when one greatly beloved is sick of a moral disease that always issues in death. That is the supreme tragedy of life. Is there anyone like that here to-night, who wonders why, in spite of all your earnest intercession, God has not yet interposed to save someone, to check him in his downward career? In my experience as a minister, I have known full many from whose view every star has been blotted out of the sky, because of that fearful malady which had laid hold of

heart and conscience, and was bringing the soul of one beloved down to utter destruction, and while no human power availed to stay its progress—God seemed not to hear.

II.

But Mary had been also THE WITNESS OF A GREAT MIRACLE, for at last the Lord Jesus had really come. He had deliberately tarried to allow Lazarus to grow worse. He had remained away in order to create a situation in which His glory should be displayed. In the meantime Lazarus had died. I suppose they thought: "Perhaps He may get here before the funeral", but He did not. And they carried him out to the sepulchre, and buried him, rolled the stone against its mouth, and returned to the emptiest house in the world—except yours, when you returned on a similar occasion. It seemed as though all the world had become empty. There was no one left in it, because one greatly beloved was gone.

After some days Martha came hurriedly in. She had been out of the house somewhere, and she had heard news, and she had hastened to meet the Master. Then she returned with all speed to Mary, and said: "The Master is come, and calleth for thee."

What a great day that was! Oh, some of us have had many such great days, when, in response to our appeal, the Master has really come! Some of you don't know what that means because you are not Christians. Some of you imagine I am only elaborating a theory, discussing a philosophy of things, when I speak thus. You say: "I never saw Jesus. I did not know that He could come. I thought He was a Figure in a Book—or at best, a Person in the glory. I cannot understand what you mean when you say that Jesus can and still does come." No! But I wish you knew! Oh, I wish you knew: I know! I know very well what it is to be sure that Jesus has come. "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true." At last their prayer is answered, and Jesus has come.

Sometimes that is true *in the case of physical illness*. There are some here to-night who would not be here if Jesus Christ had not come to you. We have a member in this church, she is here this evening, whose feet had dipped into the brink of the river, but Jesus Christ came, and brought her back again. Oh, no; I do not believe in divine healing meetings, nor in the orgies of emotionalism which accompany them. I am sure such meetings are contrary to Scripture, and therefore are not of God. There is nothing in the Word of God to justify the practice of the public anointing with oil. But I will tell you this: "In him we live, and move, and have our being"; "In whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways", and we live because God wills that we should live. And He recovers us from illness when we pray—He really does. Not always. Sometimes it is His will that our loved ones should go. But sometimes He actually heals. I am sure of it.

"We may not climb the heavenly steeps
To bring the Lord Christ down;
In vain we search the lowest depths,
For Him no depths can drown.

"But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is He;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee.

"The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain,
We touch Him in life's throng and press,
And we are whole again."

What happened when Jesus came? I am sure He comes in the spiritual sense. He comes to save people. One advantage of being a good while in the same pulpit is that one has the opportunity of seeing people converted, and of seeing them grow up into Christ. I can look over this congregation this evening, and pick out scores of people whom I knew before they were born again. I have seen them saved. I have seen them come as penitents to the feet of Christ. I have heard them lisp the Father's name, like little babes, and I have seen them growing up into Christ. There are not a few in this company this evening of whom that is true. Jesus Christ does come.

When He came in this case, He went to the graveside, and when He had commanded the grave to be opened, He called the dead back to life. Lazarus did really live again. And the Lord does that to-day: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins". Some of us remember well the day when, by His recreative power, we were made new creatures in Christ Jesus; when old things passed away, and all things became new.

Now Mary had seen that. She had seen her brother walk out of the grave, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes. He had come home again, and the family were reunited. And what a change had taken place!

I have been in a home before now only to be told of the dire threats the head of the house has made, the terrible things he was going to do to the preacher, and everyone else who showed any interest in religion. Many incidents could I relate out of my own experience, where it has later been my great joy in that Bethany to kneel in the midst of the family circle, where father and mother and all the children were saved. We have them here to-night. We have people here to-night from homes which were virtually prayerless homes—a Bethany with a dead Lazarus and a sorrowing family, but without Jesus. But he came, and Lazarus was made to live again. And oh, what a difference! What a marvellous change is effected when the Lord Jesus takes possession of a home!

III.

Well now Mary had witnessed all this, and BECAUSE OF THAT THE LORD JESUS BECAME THE SUPREME OBJECT OF HER DEVOTION.

I wish I could describe this scene. Tennyson attempts it in his *In Memoriam* at one point. He imagines Mary gazing upon her brother, wondering where he had been, what his experiences had been, and looking again and again from Lazarus to Jesus; and he says of her:

"Her eyes are homes of silent prayer;
No other thought her mind admits;
But he was dead, and there he sits,
And He that raised him up is there."

They are both there! Jesus came to Bethany. "There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him." Jesus and others, and Lazarus conspicuously present! And Mary is filled with wonder. Martha, the active soul, not less grateful than Mary, was busy about the house serving the Master. But Mary was of a contemplative spirit, and she could not get over the wonder of it, saying to herself again and again, through tears of joy, I fancy: "Can it, oh, can it be

true?" And she gazed upon that scene. That is what the chapter says. And listen: as she looked at Jesus and Lazarus and others "THEN took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair". Inspired by what she saw, she took this precious box of ointment that was so costly. Judas—being authority for the estimate, and he was likely to know the price of things—said it was worth more than three hundred pence, and that was more than a labourer could earn in a whole year. But she had been saving it up. She had been keeping it for a very definite purpose. She had invested, I suppose, all she had in that alabaster box of ointment; and she came and poured it upon His feet, and then stooped and taking the hairs of her head she wiped His feet with her hair. Matthew and Mark say that she poured the ointment on His head. I have no doubt she anointed His head and His feet. And as she thus bowed at the Saviour's feet, the house was filled with the odor of the ointment, so that people in other rooms, perhaps, said: "What is that? What has occurred? What has changed the atmosphere of this place? What is that sweet odour?"—the odour of the ointment, the act of devotion, the offering of all she had to the Saviour Who had done so much for her, went through all the rooms of the house, until the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

Some day, by God's grace, we shall get to that city four-square, and that will be better than Bethany. Some day we shall see there the multitude of the redeemed. You have heard of the old preacher who said he expected three surprises in heaven. He said: "The first will be that I shall miss many people whom I expected to see there. The second, that I shall meet many people of whose presence there I was never quite assured. But the greatest surprise of all will be to find myself there at last by God's redeeming grace."

When that time comes I wonder what we shall do, what we shall want to do, when we shall understand more clearly than we do to-day our immeasurable indebtedness to the Lord of Glory. How then shall we express our love to Him?

Mary's was an offering of gratitude. What can we do to show our gratitude? Perhaps if we had three hundred pence we might give it. But if we have not, we all have something to give:

"But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe;
Here, Lord, I give myself away;
'Tis all that I can do."

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" Often I think of Bethany as a picture of what a church ought to be. It was a lovely place. I wish I could have visited it when Jesus was there! It was a favourite resort of the Master. He loved to come to Bethany. A church ought to be a place where Jesus loves to be. He promises that it shall be such, and that where two or three are gathered together in His name He will be there. And this was a place where those who were trophies of His grace were gathered about Him. That is what a church ought to be—made up of raised Lazaruses, people who have been quickened from the death of sin into newness of life by the call of the Lord of resurrection. And that too is what a church ought to be. How can we ever forget it, those of us who have been called back from the death of sin?

They were all in fellowship with each other there in Bethany, and they were all in fellowship with Christ. He was at once the Host and the Guest of honour. Everybody in that Bethany home thought of one Person, and that one Person was the Lord Jesus. He was the Centre, as He ought ever to be when the saints of God come together to hold fellowship with Him.

You Jarvis Street people do not need to read other books. There are some fathers here who do not need to read other books, but think only of what God has done for your own family! And you wives, think of what God has done in your own husbands' experiences. You have had a Bethany experience. You have seen what a mighty Saviour the Lord Jesus can be, and is. Therefore, ought we to be forever grateful to Him.

It was *an offering of discernment*. I do not know how Mary learned it, but read the pages of the Gospels again, not in John only, but Matthew and Mark, and see how gradually the Lord Jesus broke the news to His disciples that He was going to die. He had to teach them much before He brought them to the position where they were able to receive that intelligence. But little by little He gradually broke to them that news. They hardly understood it, even then. And when He talked of going up to Jerusalem they said: "Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee". They were terribly afraid that their beloved Master would die. But He knew He was going to die. And yet, so far as I read, not one of all those men really understood the cross in advance. When Jesus spoke plainly of His going Peter said: "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee", but the Lord said: "Get thee behind me, Satan." They did not understand. But there was one person, I verily believe, who understood that Jesus was going to die. And when she poured out that ointment, and her tears with it, and kneeled at His feet in that act of devotion, and Judas, the cynic, with the heart of a son of perdition said: "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor", Jesus, Who knew that woman's heart said: "Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this." I verily believe that Mary knew that Jesus was going to die. Perhaps she had laid this ointment up with the intention of anointing His precious body with it. By and by—she did not know how soon—she would need it. But when that day she saw her brother, and all the others there at that supper prepared in the Master's honour, "then took Mary" her spikenard. She could not wait for Him to die, and she poured it on His feet, as though she would let the whole world know that to her Jesus Christ was more than the whole world beside. And the Lord Jesus said, "She hath done what she could: She is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying."

So ought He to be to us, my dear friends. You will have your critics if you are out and out for Christ. In our day a person who seeks to serve the Lord seven days a week can scarcely retain a reputation for sanity. That is literally true! A man who has a religion that carries him through from Monday to Saturday, is very frequently described as a fanatic, just one of those "religious people" who actually goes to prayer meeting! Of course, if you devote all there is of you, of heart and intellect, if every power you possess is laid at the Saviour's feet, and you delight to crown Him Lord of all. Judas will always say: "Why this waste?" The world can never understand a devotion that is

centred in Jesus Christ. The men and women who paid for their devotion with their blood, and who went home to glory in chariots of fire, no one understood. If you give to the Lord Jesus all there is of you, you will be misunderstood by nearly all, but the Lord Himself. He said: "Let her alone. Do not interfere with anyone who puts Me first." Mark records Him as having said: "She hath done what she could." I do not believe He ever said that of anyone else. So far as I know this is the only person of whom Jesus Christ ever did really say, "She did her best; she kept nothing back."

And our Lord Jesus is deserving of that, my dear friends. I do not call you, who are not Christians this evening, to a half-hearted devotion; I do not call you to a life that shall consist merely of church membership; no, no; give Him your all. He deserves everything, the very best of which we are capable, the most heroic service He may enable us to render, no matter what the cost; let us invest all the product of life in some box of ointment, in a life of devotion given up wholly to Him.

"I read a story of a monk, who painted,
In an old convent cell in years ago,
Pictures of martyrs, and of virgins sainted,
And the sweet Christ face with the crown of thorns.

"Poor daubs, not fit to be a chapel's treasure;
Full many a taunting word upon them fell:
Yet the good Abbot let him, for his pleasure,
Adorn with them his solitary cell.

"One night the poor monk mused, 'Could I but render
Honour to Christ as other painters do,
Were but my skill as great as is the tender love that in-
spires me
When His cross I view;

"But no! 'tis vain I strive and toil in sorrow!
What men so scorn, still less must He admire;
My life's work is all valueless! To-morrow
I'll cast my ill-wrought pictures in the fire."

"He raised his eyes within his cell, O wonder!
There stood a Visitor; thorn-crowned was He;
And a sweet voice the silence rent asunder:
'I scorn no work that's done for love of Me'.

"There is a meaning in the strange old story:
Let none dare judge his brother's worth or mead;
The pure intent gives to the act its glory;
The noblest purpose makes the grandest deed."

May He, by His grace, make us all to be His disciples indeed.

ABOUT THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Rev. Alex. Thomson, who for a number of years, has written the exposition of the Sunday School Lesson for this paper, has notified us that he will not be able to continue beyond the end of April on account of pressure of other duties. This work has been a labour of love on Mr. Thomson's part, and THE GOSPEL WITNESS greatly appreciates his faithful service through the years.

We are now wondering whether we ought to continue this feature of the paper, and we write this paragraph as an enquiry, to request all readers who make use of the Sunday School Lesson Exposition to let us know so that we may judge whether there is a sufficient number using the lessons to justify our continuing this feature of the paper. Please write us at once. Meanwhile, THE GOSPEL WITNESS desires to record its gratitude to Mr. Thomson for his long and able service.

PREACHERS—SERMONS—HEARERS

A Bible Lecture by Dr. T. T. Shields

Delivered in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto,
Thursday Evening, March 19th, 1936*Sixth in the 1935-36 Series of Thursday Evening Lectures
on Biblical Theology, which Subject is Included in
the Curriculum of Toronto Baptist Seminary*

(Stenographically Reported)

Lecture Text: I. Kings, chapter 14.

If theories of new religions offered for acceptance, before being offered to men, were reduced to practice, or if such reduction to practice were attempted, if our Modernist friends were to try out their Modernistic theories, let us say, in Jerry McCauley's Mission, or in Yonge Street Mission, or in the Pacific Garden Mission, in Chicago, where men come face to face, and into close contact, with sin when it has thrown off its disguise, and shows itself for what it really is, I think they would rapidly come to the conclusion that their theories required some modification, that their theories, in fact, are impractical.

We speak now about "psychology". In an earlier day they called it "mental philosophy". It is an examination of the processes of the mind, and an attempt to reduce mental processes to a system so that, as a medical doctor knows something about how the body functions, the mental philosopher would know something about the operations of the mind. To-day we call that psychology. It is an interesting science; but it is necessary that we should not content ourselves with theoretical opinions. It is well that we should study human nature, apart from books, study it as we see it every day.

That is why young ministers ought to avail themselves of every possible opportunity of getting into contact with people of all classes. That is why you should be diligent in your pastoral visitation, and in all your personal work; and, while doing so, you should study the people with whom you deal, and observe how their minds operate, so that you may be able, as wisely as possible, to present the truth. We know, of course, that only the power of the Holy Spirit can unlock the human mind to a reception of spiritual truth. It is just as necessary now that God should open human hearts as it was when He opened the heart of Lydia. But He Who made the human mind, knows how to enter it; the owner of the house surely ought to have a master-key; He ought to know through what doors He can find access to the house He has built, and which He owns. But while depending upon the Spirit of God, and recognizing that we are absolutely helpless apart from Him, we should endeavour to learn how to present truth as acceptably as may be possible. We should learn how to approach people in a proper way, how to speak appropriately.

I recall a story I heard my friend the late Dr. A. C. Dixon tell, when speaking of the unwisdom of some good people who sought to do good, but who did it in ways that were not wise. He told us of a very enthusiastic, zealous personal worker who, walking down the street one day, met a man who had but one leg, and who was walking with two crutches. The zealous tract-distributor handed the poor man a tract, the title of which was, "The evils of dancing"! Undoubtedly it was a good tract, and contained only the truth, but that

particular man had but one leg, and was scarcely in need of it!

Preachers may preach that which is true, and deliver sermons that are commendable from many points of view, but wholly inappropriate to their hearers.

The Bible is a record of truth. It is a mirror in which you may study human nature. These historical portions of Scripture, being divinely inspired, are written that we may understand; not merely the sequence of events, not merely the order in which certain historical occurrences took place, but to show how, with a kind of X-ray revelation, the Holy Spirit opens to us the workings of the human mind, and shows us how people behave themselves, and how we may deal with people of like character when we would influence them for the Lord. That, by way of introduction to what I have to say.

We have here another chapter in the history of "Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin". In our last study we observed how he was rebuked by the prophet for arrogating to himself the office of the priesthood, and for presuming to offer sacrifice at an altar which he had designed after the imagination of his own heart. We read, too, about the prophet who was deceived by an older prophet; and we have here again the story of Jeroboam's relation to a certain prophet.

I.

I should like you to note **HOW THE UNGODLY SOMETIMES MAKE A CONVENIENCE OF RELIGION; AND HOW THEY SEEK OUT THE MINISTERS OF RELIGION WHEN THEY ARE IN TROUBLE.**

Jeroboam had a son whose name was Abijah, apparently his eldest son, and heir-apparent to the throne. He must have been something more than an infant, for the record suggests that he had arrived at the age of accountability; and it was said, "In him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam." This son of Jeroboam was apparently very dear to him, as any son must be dear to his father. The son was taken seriously ill, and this man who is described as having turned his back upon God, or having put God and all His interests behind his back, yet now in the hour of distress, turns to God.

We ought to be ready to try to minister to people in times of sorrow. I hope that when you students become pastors, and are called upon to conduct funeral services, you will recognize such occasions as great opportunities for service. It sometimes happens that hearts are peculiarly tender at such times, and people are more susceptible to the appeal of religion when in great sorrow than they are at any other time. I have known not a few people who at least seemed to pray when trouble overtook them. We are not to despise these outward appearances. God only knows the hearts of men. If a man begins to show some religious interest, it is well that we take it at its face value, and give him credit for sincerity, so far as it may be reasonable for us to do so. Look upon people who are in sorrow as people who are conditioned, and sometimes providentially so, to receive a message of grace; and never allow yourself to prostitute such occasions to the base purpose of merely saying nice things, or of paying compliments to the dead. They do not need it. If your compliments are true, they do not need them; and if they are not true, they will do more harm than good. Use the opportunity to proclaim the truth to the

living. Welcome any approach that any man may make when driven by sorrow to seek the face of the Lord.

But we need to exercise the spirit of discernment. Jeroboam's religious interest was very superficial. There is nothing to indicate that he repented of his sin, nothing to suggest that he desired a closer walk with God, or a return to the divine fold. He did but want somebody to tell him the outcome of his son's illness. It is not even said that he asked for healing. He sought the prophet, that he might pull aside the veil, and discover something of the future. Hence, he sent his wife to enquire what would become of the son who was ill.

When I had been preaching but a year or so, I held special meetings under the auspices of a certain church, the pastor of which was many, many years my senior, a man of large experience. At one of the meetings there was a very loquacious brother, who seemed to be very pious, and who talked much about his sorrow for sin. I was rather moved by the fellow, and was a little put out, I must say, when I discovered that the pastor of the church was not impressed by the man's loud talk. I said to him afterward, "Are you sure you were right in treating that man as you did?" "Absolutely", he said, "there is no ring of sincerity there. I have met many of his sort. He is a man who would make trade of religion." "How do you know?" "He talks too fluently. Babes do not talk like that. He is altogether too bold to be in a frame of repentance and real contrition of heart." The man's subsequent course proved that the pastor was right.

We need to be careful not to allow people to waste our time, and not to be carried away by those who profess conversion every time an appeal is made. On another occasion I saw a man come forward, and the next night he spoke like an Apollos; quite unabashed, he delivered himself of a great oration, thanking the Lord for his standing in Christ, and adding, "But I could not have said that last night. Hallelujah; last night my sins were forgiven." I turned to the Pastor beside me and said, "That is rather an eloquent speech for a babe?" "Yes", he replied; "that is about the thirteenth time he has been converted. He will be on a drunk again next week."

There are people who play that sort of game. Be on your guard against that type of religious emotionalism—but do not allow yourself to be unduly suspicious. It is better to err on the side of too much confidence than too little. Experience will teach you, and you will discover by ringing down the coin upon the counter whether it is genuine Jerusalem metal or not, and will be guided accordingly.

Here was a man who made a superstition of his religion. He was not a spiritual man. To him, religion was a kind of magic, an enchantment. He said to his wife, "Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people. And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: he shall tell thee what shall become of the child"—as though enquiry of the word of the Lord were a kind of conjurer's trick. "Do not identify yourself, but put your question to him, and by some occult process we shall discover whether the child is going to get well—and bring me back word."

I expect Brother Greenway has had letters in this vein for the prayer-meetings—I have had a great many reading something like this: "Please pray that my husband

may get work. He is going to apply at a certain place to-morrow, and I should like you to pray at that very hour. I do not want to give my name, but if you will do this I feel my husband will be successful"—the whole letter bearing the stamp of the prayer of Jeroboam, as though the Lord would be tricked into doing something for an anonymous petitioner.

In principle, I do not know that they are very far short of it, who read the Bible after that fashion. Someone has "a promise box"—why do you not have a prayer wheel, and spin it around to see where it stops! A promise box! Possibly it was put together by someone who knows nothing about God, and cared nothing for His word, but printed verses from the Bible on little slips of paper, rolled them up, and put them in a box; and sold them. And then forsooth the believer, by a hit and miss method, draws one out and says, "This is my promise for to-day." That is not Christianity.

I once attended a service of Primitive Baptists. In England they would be called, "Strict and Particular Baptists"—hyper of hypers, hyper-Calvinists. They used to come to hear me preach in the morning, when I had a pastorate in that district, but seldom at night. They said, "We understand Mr. Shields very well in the morning, but we cannot understand him in the evening because when he preaches the gospel to sinners he appeals to them to receive Christ". I went to one of their May meetings, and a certain very learned man was to preach. He opened his Bible and prayed, the big pulpit Bible; and as he said, Amen, he let it fall—and his eye lit upon John three, sixteen. He preached an able—and a most thoroughly prepared sermon—from that text. Young as I was, I was too well instructed in the business to be deceived into believing that he had at that moment been given his text.

But there are some people who would call that "the sovereignty of God"; who would insist that He directed the opening of the Book. It was a bit of religious deception. The religion of Christ is for the whole man. When you become a Christian, and really put your trust in God, He never asks you to stultify your intelligence, to set aside your understanding—but rather to use it. Therefore we are to read the Word of God, and know it so thoroughly that we shall know where to go to find instruction.

When the Lord Jesus began His ministry, and there was handed to Him the roll of the prophet Esaias, we are told that "when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written". He read from Isaiah's prophecy, and after reading, "he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears". He knew where to find the message He wanted to deliver; He "found it", and delivered it.

Let us remember that unbelief and superstition always go hand in hand. When men turn away from the divine oracles, not infrequently they resort to some kind of magic, if not to a trick of disguise, in an endeavour to wrest a message from the prophet. Sometimes perhaps, like Saul, they resort to a witch. In our day we find many extreme Modernists who reject the doctrine of the divine inspiration and authority of Scripture, believing in the divine inspiration of what they write on their pad in their "quiet hours" while they are awaiting "guidance". When we pray, we are to use our intelligence;

we are to approach God as His child; there must be no deception about it. "O Lord, attend unto my cry", said the Psalmist, "give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips." We must be sincere when we come to the mercy-seat.

How strangely the story reads! Ahijah was an old man, and "his eyes were set by reason of his age". They were dim; he was almost blind. Jeroboam knew that, for he must have known what age Ahijah was. He had known Ahijah before. It was he who prophesied the rending of the kingdom, and the giving of ten tribes to Jeroboam. Jeroboam knew this preacher, and knew he was an old man. But he said to his wife, "We will make assurance doubly sure. Disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people. And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him."

I fear that sometimes people do actually try to disguise themselves from God, and imagine that He cannot see. What a strange conception Jeroboam entertained of God and His ways! How far had he departed in heart from God when he resorted to such tricks as these! If you study the devotions of some people, and their professed approach to God, you will learn much. Listen to what they say, and see how far short their religious conceptions are of the teaching of the Word of God. A diligent study will unveil their hearts to your view, as when Peter went down to Samaria and found a man who had deceived everybody else, a man who had been a sorcerer, trying to dress up his magic in religious guise. As he had made much gain by his sorcery, he planned to do the same of the gospel: "When Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." Instantly Peter said, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." Peter immediately recognized that Simon was a fraud; there was nothing genuine about him. And I believe we need, in our day, to pray much for that spiritual discernment which will enable us to recognize the hypocrite, that we may not be deceived thereby.

II.

A word as TO HOW THE PROPHET WAS PREPARED FOR THE APPROACH OF THE WIFE OF JEROBOAM. She put on her disguise, came with her basket on her arm, made her way to the house of the blind prophet—and listen to the Book: "And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings." The disguise did not conceal her identity even from a blind prophet—it never does. The blind prophet did not even wait until the woman spoke, but when he heard the sound of her feet, he greeted her. The Lord had been there before her.

And I say to you young preachers, that God does come to His prophets even now. He does lay a message upon the heart of His prophet even now. He will tell you what to preach next Sunday if you seek Him. A Salvation Army captain once said to me, "I do not

understand you preachers." I answered, "Perhaps not, but why?" "You prepare your sermons in advance." "Do you not prepare yours?" "Never." "And why not?" "How can I know in advance who is going to be in the meeting Sunday? I trust the Lord to give me the message, and I wait until I see the people." I smiled, and said, "How do you trust the Lord when you use your own judgment? I do not know who is going to be in my congregation neither, but the Lord does. I ask Him to give me a message for the people He is going to send to hear it."

That is what happened to Ahijah. His sermon was prepared in advance. If I may paraphrase it, the Lord said, "Ahijah, you are going to have a stranger in your congregation. The people generally will not know her. She will come in a strange dress; she will have a basket on her arm; and she comes with a strange question. She is the wife of Jeroboam, nevertheless; and when she comes, give her this message."

In my first pastorate I was privileged with the friendship of an elderly lady, who was a godly Presbyterian. One day when I called to see her, she gave me a volume of Spurgeon's sermons. I had read many of his sermons, but that was the first volume I really owned. In that volume there was a sermon on this verse, "And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings." I will not tell you how many years ago it was, but it was a long time before some of you thought of preaching—before some of you thought of crying. If I am not mistaken, the title of the sermon was, "A hearer in disguise".

I read the sermon with interest, and years afterward I bought Spurgeon's Autobiography. There is a chapter in one of those four volumes which relates certain remarkable incidents in connection with particular sermons, how they were used of God in special cases. I found my old friend there, the sermon on the wife of Jeroboam. This was the story, as I now recall it from memory.

There was a man of some quality, of some position in life, who came to hear Mr. Spurgeon preach, and was marvellously converted. He went home and told his wife, and it seemed as though a legion of devils possessed her. She resolved to make life unbearable for him—and she very nearly succeeded. His life was a little bit of hell—or at least, it was purgatory. One Sunday night this woman had made a desperate effort to keep her husband from church. She had been as ugly as she knew how to be. And women can be ugly! I mean when they try! They really can! The man had been kind to his wife, but would not allow her to keep him from worship. He left for church, and after he had gone she felt uncomfortable. "I wonder", she said to herself, "what sort of place that is he attends?" She knew the name of it, but she had never been there. A voice seemed to say, "Why not go yourself?" "It is late, and I might be seen. Someone might recognize me. I know what I will do, I will dress like a costermonger's wife, and no one will know me." Accordingly she put on an old dress, threw a shawl over her head instead of a hat, and went to the Tabernacle.

She got there late. The first part of the service was over. The place, as usual, was crowded, but she man-

aged to squeeze in among those standing in the top gallery. Just as she got inside the door she heard Spurgeon's marvellous voice ringing out his text, "And it was so, when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, that he said, Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another?" The preacher went on with his sermon, and, among other things, he said that this woman had never before heard the preacher, and perhaps there are some in this audience who have never been in the Tabernacle until to-night. Why did she come? She came *because her husband had heard the preacher before*. The woman stood just inside the door, and the word of the Lord slew her, cut her in pieces. When her husband got home he found that her heart had been broken, and the Lord had entered in.

That is not ancient history. I could tell you incident after incident, out of my own experience, just as remarkable, did it not seem egotistical to do so, where a text has come out of the unknown, without reading the Book at the moment, but has just lodged itself in my mind, saying, "This is your text for next Sunday." And I have discovered that not only the text, but the sermon itself, the application, illustrations and all, were exactly suited to someone there of whose existence I had not known.

I believe that is our duty. Do not forget that the preacher must be a prophet of the Lord. His duty is not to preach sermons, but to prophesy. I used to know a man who had some sermons of which he was very, very proud. Firstly, secondly, thirdly—a, b, c, d, e, f, and g. They were splendidly ordered. And I have nothing to say against having your sermons well ordered. You cannot have chicken without bones: I wish you could. But it seems to me I always get the bones

(I see Mr. Jennings smiling: he is thinking of the chicken we had down South). But when you preach a sermon that has bones, see to it that it is not like Southern chickens: have some meat on it. Sermons should have so much meat on them that you cannot find the bones. This preacher to whom I refer when anyone visited his study, would direct the conversation to preaching, saying something like this, "I preached sometime ago on a certain text. Ah yes, I have it here. What do you think of this?" Then he would read his sermon to a much-bored hearer. He was a preacher of sermons, not a messenger of the Lord, although his sermons were orthodox.

We must live in such relationship to God that He may put us into direct relationship to the people to whom we minister. If we are in proper relationship to Him, He will tell us who will be our hearers next Sunday, and we shall receive a message at His hand.

I add only this word. Whatever you do as students, whatever you fail to read, do not fail to read and study Spurgeon's sermons. Do not preach them; do not try to wear Saul's armour. Do not preach other men's sermons, but study them, absorb them. If you have not read Spurgeon's Autobiography, if you are not steeped in Spurgeon, you are ignorant of the most thrilling evangelical biography that was ever written. There is nothing like it from the time of the apostles until now. All other preachers, even the greatest are, or were, only midgets in comparison. He was a giant indeed. Read about him; study him diligently. You will learn something of how to use the Old Testament in preaching.

I had intended to complete the chapter, but we must leave the rest for next week.

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