

THE HOME OF SIMON TO STRENGTHEN A SAINT
THE HOME OF SIMON TO STRENGTHEN A SAINT (MATTHEW 26:6-7)

"Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the home of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head as he sat at meat." Perhaps Martha was busy in her kitchen when she heard a voice saying, "May I come in?" She smiled when she saw her friend who lived down the street. She liked him, but that was not a cause for amazement; she liked everybody! Simon, who had been a leper, asked, "Is it true the Master is expected today?" His face became radiant when she replied, "Yes, Simon, Jesus will be here this afternoon." When her visitor seemed embarrassed, she asked, "What is on your mind, Simon?" He thought for a moment and then answered, "Well, Martha, you know I was a leper, and but for the Master's help I would have died. He was kind to me, and now I would like to do something for Him. I know He always stays in this house, and that is wonderful, but would you object if I invited Him to supper tonight? I am not a good cook and would appreciate your help." That gracious lady agreed to become the hostess for the forthcoming meal, and later when the Savior arrived, she whispered, "Master, You remember Simon the leper. We are going to have supper in his house tonight. It will mean so much to him for he thinks he will never be able to pay the debt he owes to You."

The name Simon was common throughout Palestine, and that led to the practice of adding something that resembled a surname. To differentiate between people bearing the same name, neighbors referred to them as Simon the tanner (see Acts 9:43); Simon the Pharisee (see Luke 7:40); Simon the leper (see Matt. 26:6). There were others such as Simon who carried the cross of Jesus and Simon the sorcerer. There has been much speculation regarding the Simon who lived in Bethany; some teachers believe he was either the husband or father of Martha. This appears to be improbable, for he lived in his own home, and it would be difficult to explain why he did not reside with his family.

It is believed this man had been a leper until he met Jesus of Nazareth. It is easy to imagine what happened on that memorable occasion and to understand why he decided to live in Bethany. He might have been a relative of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, whose

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financial assistance enabled him to establish a new home. These are only possibilities, but certain facts are indisputable.

An Unsurpassable Gift... An Incurable Disease

Nothing is known about the early life of this unique man. but many theories have been expressed concerning his illness. Was he the leper who knelt before the Lord? (see Matt. 8:2). Is it possible that he was one of the ten unfortunate men who cried for mercy? (see Luke 17:12-13). Could he have been an inmate of a leper colony, and did some friend or relative intercede on his behalf? The Scriptures do not mention how, when, or where the leper was cleansed, and suggestions can only be speculative. One fact is irrefutable; the man was threatened by death until he met Jesus of Nazareth and received hope for the future. Christ was the only person able to perform that miracle--at that time there was no known cure for leprosy.

The meeting with the Savior brought new life to the sufferer. This is probably one of the most important facts revealed in the Bible. The Lord said He came into the world to save sinners. Simon

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Peter claimed: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Paul wrote, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Lepers could neither save themselves nor pay for their deliverance. Their survival depended upon the ability of Jesus to respond and their determination to seek His aid. This truth cannot change. Even the greatest scientist cannot create life nor defeat death, yet the Savior did both.

An Unending Gratitude... An Increasing Debt

Memories are messengers from the past, reminders of events that might disappear into oblivion. Since Simon did not become an itinerant evangelist, it was necessary to establish a home, and after some consideration he decided to live in Bethany. If he was a friend of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, the desire to become their neighbor was understood and appreciated. He would have liked to remain with Jesus forever, but since that was impossible, he was content to live near people who shared his love for the Lord. Every day he reminisced, and the awareness of his debt to Jesus deepened. How could he express to his Benefactor all that was within his soul? Had he been a public speaker, he would have been among the seventy

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disciples. Had he been a younger man, many avenues of service would have been forthcoming. Unfortunately there was not much he could do. Every day Simon considered his options, but when he heard of the imminent arrival of Jesus, it seemed that his silent prayers had been answered.

He could and would invite Jesus to dinner, and if Martha would take charge of the kitchen arrangements, the forthcoming meal would be the best ever prepared. He was anxious to make that evening a time to be remembered. Within moments Simon was on his way to Martha's home. Nothing was ever recorded about the meal except that Mary anointed the head of Jesus with the expensive ointment. Simon's shining eyes were trying to tell the Master He was loved and appreciated. People who forget to return thanks are unworthy of commendation.

An Understanding Guest... An Interested Deliverer

The Lord enjoyed and appreciated the reception in the home of the former leper and watched as Martha proudly carried in what had been prepared. He was thrilled to be entertained by His friends, but it was strange that He who had used a lad's lunch to feed a multitude was pleased to receive whatever was provided by Simon. The Lord could have supplied the greatest meal ever conceived in the mind of God, for He had helped to plant the garden eastward in Eden and had created every fruit and vegetable. He was pleased to receive a love-offering from sincere friends. Simon was ecstatic, but the Lord was happier than the host.

This reflected the pattern of Christ's entire ministry. The Lord never solicited financial assistance, the disciples never received a collection in any service, and as far as is known, they were not sponsored by wealthy patrons. It was expensive to maintain their work over a period of three and a half years. The preachers needed food, and their clothing and footwear did not last forever. On one occasion in order to pay taxes Peter was sent to catch a fish that had a coin in its mouth, but never in any emergency did Jesus appeal for financial assistance. Modern evangelists do not emulate their Master's example.

Evidently some people helped to meet the need of that dedicated

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company, and what they gave was supervised by Judas "who kept the bag." The Lord could have provided everything necessary to maintain the smooth operation of His crusade, but He allowed

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people to share the responsibility of spreading the gospel. Sacrificial giving enabled men and women to develop their spirituality. They gave and discovered God always returned more than they had given. The great Physician, in visiting the home of Simon, saw improvement in His patient. The former leper was enjoying perfect health! Throughout the centuries Christ has not changed. He always gives more than He receives.

An Unmistakable Gesture... An Important Duty

If some person had asked Simon why he invited the Lord to supper, he would have probably replied, "I was compelled to invite Him. It was my inescapable duty to welcome Him into my home." People who profess to be grateful for blessing received and whose hands remain closed become misers. They are inhospitable, selfish, and unattractive. It has often been said, "It is better to give than receive," but some people never know that pleasure.

There has always been a great difference between ministering to the Lord and ministering for Him. Both aspects of Christian service are splendid, but doing something personal for Christ is the most commendable of spiritual endeavors. When Simon witnessed to his friends and neighbors about the cleansing power of the Savior, he did something for the Lord, thereby helping to extend His influence. When he planned that sumptuous meal, he was only concerned with the Savior's personal pleasure. Success in extending the kingdom of God is certain to attract attention and public acclaim. Pleasing the Lord may never do this, but it thrills the heart of God. Unfortunately some Christians are too busy to sit at His feet.

When Luke described the prayer meeting held in the church at Antioch, he wrote, "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said: Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:1-2). All the men mentioned by Luke were ardent servants of Christ, who spent most of their time ministering within the church. They were prophets and teachers who instructed believers. Yet on this occasion the busy workers were hushed. Their eyes were focused on the Lord. They were ministering to Jesus. All preachers should kneel before the Savior before they stand before people.

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Simon the leper in all probability had witnessed to neighbors on many occasions; he loved doing this for his Master, yet his finest hour came when, forgetting others, he completely centered his attention on Christ. Had he failed to do this, his soul would have been impoverished.

An Undiminished Glory. An Inspiring Delight

During that memorable evening in the neighbor's home, Mary electrified the gathering when she anointed the Lord with her very precious ointment. The action aroused indignation in some of the disciples, and thereafter the warmth of Simon's hospitality was overshadowed. There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when the disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying,

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To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. . . Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matt. 26:7-13). Did the criticism ruin the serenity of Simon's party? Probably frowns appeared on the faces of those who watched and listened, but unseen by many was the simple fact that Mary's act of devotion brought immortality to the kindly host. The world knows about the gift of that delightful woman, but they also know the incident happened in the home of Simon, whose soul was filled with gratitude. The Savior knew there would be innumerable people interested in expressing their thanks for blessings received, and to encourage them He said, "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of

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these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:34-40). Solomon said, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Eccl. 9:10). The time to minister to Christ is now; the opportunity to win souls for His kingdom is now—no soul will be saved in eternity.

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