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The Sinner's Friend

Sermon preached by

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at "Zoar" Chapel, Canterbury, on Sunday evening, 7th August 1955

Text: Luke xv. 2

"This Man receiveth sinners"

This is a truth which rejoices the heart of sinners born again. Does that include you? Are you such a character? A wondrous mercy to have some well-grounded evidence of being a sinner born again, a sinner solemnly aware in every day life that one *is* a sinner, and sometimes feeling, "No sinner needed mercy more than ever sought God's face, than I." This word, "This Man receiveth sinners," touches a chord in the soul of such a one. Yet, strange to tell, when this truth was set forth the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, "This Man receiveth *sinners*, and eateth with them." The enmity that was in their hearts found expression with such a word which they spake in irony; and yet it was a blessed truth, and a truth, as I have said, in which every sinner born again rejoices.

I would like as the Lord shall help me to look at this subject from two or three viewpoints. "*This Man receiveth sinners.*" Mark, the word is in the present sense. Do not think this word is just a little piece of history, something that you look back on today that took place long ago. This truth is an everyday truth; and it is a mercy for preacher and people alike that the throne of grace is open to receive sinners still. "*This Man receiveth sinners.*" A mercy it is to feel to be such a sinner as this Man receiveth.

Now, first of all, I would say a little about this Man.

"This wondrous Man of whom we tell,
Is true, almighty God.
He died to save our souls from hell,
The price His Own heart's blood."

It was necessary for this Man to be made manifest as "this Man" that He might receive sinners. He is verily God and verily Man, this Man referred to in the text; "This Man receiveth sinners." I would look at that just a little as grace is given.

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, and all was ready, and Eden's garden was prepared with a fulness of earthly happiness, God made man [little m to that man]; He made man in His Own image, and set that man in Eden's garden under a law, and He gave that man a free will whereby he was able to keep that law under which he was put. Eve likewise had a free will; and for a time Adam and Eve dwelt in Eden's garden in the midst of all that earthly happiness, a wondrous fullness which no preacher can say much about beyond what the word of God says about it. Then, alas, what is called the "Adam Fall" took place, and it was evident that Adam, as a man, had failed. He had exercised his free will to abuse it and undo himself and all the human race together. "Sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Read it when you get home, and

ask God to help you to think on it to purpose and profit. It is solemn reading as to what happened in Eden's garden after the Adam Fall took place. The Lord God drove out the man, and the woman, too, and they went out into the world now under a curse, and God placed an angel with a fiery, flaming sword that turned every way, to guard the way that led to the tree of life. A very solemn picture it is, and one that you need to look at often. The Adam Fall was like dropping a stone in a pond, and the ripples keep going out when you do that; and from that day that Adam fell to this the ripples have been going out.

"O thou hideous monster, Sin,
What a curse hast thou brought in!
All creation groans through thee,
Pregnant cause of misery."

So the first man failed in that which he was appointed to do. Although he had the ability, the capacity to do what he was commanded to do, yet he abused it, and the Adam Fall took place.

Then God in His infinite wisdom ordained that there should be another Man [capital M to that Man], the Man referred to in our text. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His [Own] Son, made of a woman, made under the law." God in our nature. "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see"; the eternal Son of God in His divine nature made manifest on earth as verily Man. Blessed be God, this Man in the text did not fail, but He lived His life under the law. What doth the law say to a sinner born under it? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." No mortal man ever did it yet, or ever will do; but this Man in the text did it.

"In Him the Father never saw
The least transgression of His law.
Perfection, then, in Him we view;
The saints in Him are perfect, too."

This Man lived His life under the law, and kept it in all its holy demands, thoughts, words, deeds; and at the end of His lovely life, what did He say? "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." So this Man lived His life, and *He did not fail*, blessed be God! And now poor sinners have a righteousness wherein to appear before God, if they are made aware that they have none of their own in which to stand and are driven through necessity to cry:

"Naked come to Thee for dress,
Helpless look to Thee for grace."

Remember that!

Not only so, this Man, having lived His life—and His Father said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"—then He went up Calvary's hill and died, because He was "this Man". He had that blessed, wondrous humanity; and He died in the stead of poor sinners like you and me. Oh, do think of it! It will do you good. "Christ died for our sins." "Christ died for the ungodly." It was indeed demonstrated that He was, beyond words to describe, the sinners' Friend when He hung on Calvary's cross and proclaimed, "It is finished."

"It is finished," cried the Lord,
In His dying minute;
Holy Ghost, repeat the word!
Full salvation's in it."

Then this Man, His holy humanity, was laid in the grave for a little while; but death could not hold Him; He could not be holden in the cords of it. No. So there came that glorious Easter morning, and the words went forth, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." He arose as God in our nature; verily Man, verily God. Remember that! And it is as God in our nature that He ascended up on high, and on the throne of Grace Jesus Christ reigns, verily Man, verily God; "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." He reigns on the throne of grace to do poor sinners good, and He delights in mercy. I sometimes think of the gospel as people are singing it, and I do wish people would think more about what they do sing when they sing the songs of Zion; and *you* sing:

"Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity joined with power;
He is able;
He is willing; doubt no more."

And that is the truth before us, "This Man receiveth sinners." What did you sing? "Christ is the Friend of sinners." And He is! Look at the demonstration of it all through the word of God.

"No sinner was ever yet empty sent back,
Who came seeking mercy for Jesus's sake."

The word of the Lord is, "Whosoever shall call on the Name of the Lord *shall be saved*"; and this word, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." "This Man receiveth sinners."

I ask you, what is your attitude to this Man? The word of God says, as regards the world at large, "He is despised, and rejected of men." Is that your attitude toward this Man? Oh, be ashamed of yourself, then, if it is! Because all that you have that makes life livable comes to you through this Man. Do you believe it?

"Thee we own a perfect Saviour,
Only source of all that's good;
Every grace and every favour
Comes to us through Jesus' blood."

I say, what think ye of Christ? What is this Man to you? You say, "Oh, how glad I should be if I could only be assured this Man will receive a sinner like me." What shall I say to *you*? I will say to you what the word of God says, "Prove Me now herewith . . . if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." What does this Man say to poor sinners who feel like you do? "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." And that is the gospel of the grace of God which is preached unto you.

"Jesus' blood through earth and skies,
'Mercy, eternal mercy,' cries."

"This Man *receiveth sinners*." Much might be said about this Man. Oh how good it is if in your heart He does reign on a throne set up there, your spiritual affections, so that you sometimes plead:

"Reign o'er me as King, accomplish Thy will,
And powerfully bring me forth from all ill;
Till, falling before Thee, I laud Thy loved Name,
Ascribing the glory to God and the Lamb."

I will look at the subject, as the Lord shall help me, from yet another viewpoint, although much might be said about this Man.

"This Man receiveth sinners." When do you think this Man first received sinners? I was going to say this, and I will, with great reverence—let this Man speak for Himself about it. Long before this world was built or time was born, this Man tells us in that wondrous "Holy of Holies" chapter in John's gospel, chapter 17, when, as verily Man, He was praying to His Father—what did He say concerning these sinners in the text? "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me." So in eternal purposes all whom God the Father ordained to life eternal Jesus Christ received, and undertook to be their Surety and their Substitute; and as I said at the outset, to be their Mediator, that God and man might come together on friendly terms in the fulness of time, and all that vast host, ordained to life eternal, might be saved with an everlasting salvation.

This Man received sinners, then, first of all in eternal purposes; but then, "this Man receiveth sinners." Now the great thing is to be such a sinner as this Man receiveth. Mark the word, "sinners". You will find, if you are taught of God, there is no word so fits you to tell the truth as to what your character is as you feel it to be—as you feel it to be before God. Remember that! You will not be living before men like a sinner. No! But when you appear before God you will have to learn that the word "sinner" is just the word to use as you appear before Him. "God be merciful to me a sinner," the word of God says of the dear publican; and it may be you all know that, in the original, godly scholars tell us, it is "God be merciful to me the sinner." The dear publican felt there was no other sinner about like he felt to be as a sinner. All who are taught of God feel likewise. Sometimes you look within and weigh matters up as you are made to turn again every day and see greater abominations than you have yet seen:

"Is this polluted heart
A dwelling fit for Thee?"
Swarming, alas, in every part,
What evils do I see?"

Oh how glad you are then to think of this great truth, "This Man receiveth sinners," for it encourages you to hope in God, and something will say within, "Who can tell but what God will be gracious unto me?"

The word of God tells us that, "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall convince the world of sin." It is so essential. I try to stress it often in my ministry. I see the great necessity of it in our denominational life—a gracious conviction of sin, to be known and felt amongst us. Oh, it is so desirable! What did you sing?

"To see sin smarts but slightly;
To own with lip confession
Is easier still; but oh, to feel
Cuts deep beyond expression."

Good it is to have some heartfelt evidence of being a convinced sinner; and if you are, I will tell you one thing that you will live to prove, and that is, in your approaches to God you will be glad to take up the scripture language to express what you feel within; you will not be able often to put it in your own words, but you will stand alongside Isaiah: "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." Or you will say with Job, "Behold, I am vile"; a sinner vile!

Or it may be you will echo the words of Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" "This Man receiveth sinners"; and oh, they are convinced sinners; sinners who are solemnly aware of what sinners they are, helpless sinners, guilty sinners. Yes. As you look back at times along life's way, how you are brought in guilty before God as you see sins in thought, word, and deed, testifying against you; sins of omission, sins of commission. Then the question arises:

"Depth of mercy, can there be
Mercy for a wretch like me?"

Now the gospel tells you, "Yes, there is!" Remember that! The throne of grace is open for poor sinners such as you. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

You will be thinking, some of you, "I know it is true, 'This Man receiveth sinners,' but it seems to me to be too good to be true, and too big to be true, that this Man will receive a sinner like me." You must not judge it by what you feel about it, or your own thoughts concerning the matter; but you must judge only by what the word of God declares; and you will find, if you search the sacred pages, that the word of God is sure. "Him that cometh unto Me"—I have already quoted it—"I will in no wise cast out." And this word is in the sacred pages, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." "This Man receiveth sinners"; sensible sinners; and sometimes they are such miserable sinners!

Then, as the Lord shall help me, I will look at the subject like this: "This Man receiveth sinners." I have already hinted that this Man received sinners first of all in His eternal purposes; but then it is worded in the present tense: "This Man receiveth sinners." Where does this Man receive sinners?—First of all "this Man receiveth sinners" at the throne of grace, and when the sinner is born again that is where he is found as the blessed outcome of it. That word is made manifest in that sinner's life, "Behold, he prayeth." Is that the truth about you? The Lord bless you, then! You will prove it to be a sure word, "This Man receiveth sinners," at the throne of grace. "I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat." I have sometimes thought how wonderful is the contemplation of it, if our eyes could be opened to see what is really happening as regards sinners born again, you would see all over the world a countless multitude of sinners, knocking on mercy's door, if so be they might find in Jesus, as the sinner's Friend, all their salvation and all their desire. Some little while ago there was a word in the Revelation that seemed quite a help to me, and it seemed such a simple illustration, as you read about the city of God in the concluding chapters of the Book of Revelation, "On the east three gates: on the north three gates, on the south three gates; and on the west three gates." You see, God is approachable from the north, south, east, west; wherever you are as a poor sinner in a felt need of what Jesus Christ is as the sinner's Friend, God is approachable, God is seekable. Yes, "This Man receiveth sinners" at the throne of grace. There is a striking word in the Book of Job, if you like to read it with that thought uppermost: "Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any." That is the gospel of the grace of God! "He will regard the prayer

of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." "This Man receiveth sinners." And if you will argue, as I hinted a while ago, that it seems an impossibility that this Man will receive a sinner like you, do look into the word of God and see some of the sinners, and some of the most unlikely, too, that this Man was pleased to receive! Think of Manasseh, a right down scamp who made Jerusalem's streets run with rivers of blood! I have said to my own dear people sometimes that if you and I had lived then, and stood on the pavements of Jerusalem, and thought on Manasseh, we should have concluded he was just about fit fuel for hell fire; and it looked like it; but he was a sinner to be saved by grace, and you are not to limit the grace of God, either. The word of God says, "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound"; and God *is* the God of all grace; and His word is, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious," irrespective of what man may think about it, though he may cavil at it and question that it should reach this one or that. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." So Manasseh was a sinner this Man did receive, blessed be His Name as the sinner's Friend! In his affliction Manasseh called on the Lord his God, and he was made welcome. I was going to say this, and I will, God is just like that, as the sinner's Friend. "This Man receiveth sinners."

Look, too, at Saul of Tarsus. Look at Mary Magdalene. Look at the dying thief. And then surely, surely, poor sinner, you will begin to conclude there is hope in God for such a sinner as you feel to be! "This Man receiveth sinners at the throne of grace."

And "this Man receiveth sinners" at that fountain open for sin and for uncleanness. One hymn writer says,

"The blood that purchased our release,
It washes out all stains.
We challenge earth or hell to show
A soul it cannot cleanse."

"In that day there shall be a fountain opened . . . for sin and for uncleanness." Oh precious blood beyond words to describe! How precious in the efficacy of it and the felt application on one's conscience, so that you feel, "This Man receiveth sinners," black sinners; and yet you can say, "I am black, but comely." Yes, "We're clean, just God, we're clean!" "This Man receiveth sinners" at the fountain opened for sin.

Then I would add this, "This Man receiveth sinners" in the exceeding great and precious promises in the gospel. You may sometimes feel, as you search the gospel, that there is no promise that seems to take you in as you desire, because you cannot feel to be the character referred to. I remember many years ago when I was preaching on the south coast on one occasion, that I was constrained to preach from the text, "And yet there is room"; and after the service a godly woman came to me and said that when she was a young woman in her late twenties she was cut down, called by grace, and convinced of sin; and then she began to search the word of God if so be she could light upon some promise; but she did not feel that she could get an interest in any promise because she could not feel that she was the character referred to. At last she said, "Is there no promise, O Lord, to take me in, such a sinner as I feel to be?" and

the words came, "And yet there is room." That raised her up to her first little gleam of hope in God; and she had been waiting year in and year out for some servant of God to preach from it and confirm her soul regarding it; and it was given to me to have the privilege to do that. I think she had waited about forty years to hear such a text preached from. She found there was room in the promises of God. And there is! "This Man receiveth sinners" in the exceeding great and precious promises" of His glorious gospel; and if you are a sinner born again, if you search the scriptures you will find in heaven's own light there *is* a promise that fits you, a promise to encourage you, a promise so that you shall say, "Remember the word unto Thy servant upon which Thou hast caused me to hope."

"Oh, what amazing words of grace
Are in the gospel found,
Suited to every sinner's case
That knows his soul's deep wound."

Then I must say, "This Man receiveth sinners" at the gospel table. I hope some of you have proved the truth of that, when you come to worship, and, if you come aright, you do come to get some good for your soul, if so you can get in touch with Him who is the sinner's Friend, and be built up in our most holy faith; and sometimes when the gospel is preached and the power of God attends it, then you find there is *something for you*. It is good when you and the preacher sent with divine authority to preach can walk in sweet agreement, and that word in Solomon's Song is applicable to you, "The watchmen that go about the city found me." Remember this, the watchmen who go about the city only search out the inhabitants—citizens that dwell *inside* the city. They do not have to deal with those outside, but to search out the characters for whom the gospel is indeed "good tidings of great joy". "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"; but the gospel is to a specific character, therefore he who is sent with a "Thus saith the Lord" must delineate the character, for that is his business. When you find, "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man," that should encourage you to hope in God that you are the character referred to, and thus prove "this Man receiveth sinners" in the gospel of His grace. The gospel is for sinners born again. No others have an ear to hear it. If they are found under it, as a rule it is to fall out with it and long for the Amen to set them going in the world wherein they are at home.

"This Man receiveth sinners" and sometimes under the gospel have not you found there has been room for *you*? It may not be much in a sermon. Sometimes people say—it is not often it can be said, I believe—"It was all for me." Well, I will say this, you are not the only "me" in the place, and there could be another "me" who could share it, too, although it seemed to you it was all for you. Be thankful if you get just a crumb or two of mercy let down into your troubled breast when you are listening to the gospel, and it is preached as the power of God unto salvation in your soul's experience. "This Man receiveth sinners" at the gospel table.

I like to think of the Tabernacle worship, and how it shadowed forth in many aspects of it Jesus Christ and His gospel. You will remember that in the Tabernacle worship there was a shewbread

able found in the Holy Place, and on the Sabbath Day there were always twelve new loaves placed upon it, and the old loaves were removed and the priests had the privilege to eat the same. It has sometimes been a sweet reflection to me that before the new shewbread was placed on it the table was sprinkled with blood, so that the table was as it were sanctified to receive the bread upon it. What does that teach us? Remember what the psalmist says, "I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread." I understand the meaning to be this, that when you hear the gospel, it may be, or read the word of God, and it is made to you a blessed reality, when you can say, "I rejoice in Thy word as one that findeth great spoil," or with Jeremiah, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart";—when you hear the gospel, and not only hear it, but you eat it, as the word of God says, "The meek shall eat and be satisfied and increase their joy *in the Lord*"—when God grants you such an experience, you could not enter into it unless you had an interest in the blood of Jesus Christ shed for you. Remember that! Think on these things as the Lord shall help you.

"I can have no access to God,
But through the merits of Christ's blood."

That is the meaning! And wonderful it is if, here a little and there a little, you find at times that "this Man" receives a sinner like you at the gospel table. Then you hurry off home when the Amen has concluded the service; you are not standing about gossiping and losing the little bit of help you have got from God, but you hurry off, I say, if so be you can chew the cud; yes, and enjoy the secret of the Lord which is with them that fear Him.

One more thought, and that is this, "This Man receiveth sinners" into heaven. Oh, what a wonderful consideration that is! You will say, "I am living my life, and now I am getting old and grey-headed, and I think about stepping out of time into eternity.

"How stands the case, my soul with thee?
For heaven are thy credentials clear?"

Oh, will it be that I shall hear the sinner's Friend saying, "Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world?" If you have been made welcome as a sinner at the throne of grace, and sometimes been able to say with Asaph, "It is good for me to draw near unto God"; or with the psalmist, "Blessed be God for He hath heard my prayer, nor turned away His mercy from me," poor sinner, when you have done with this life you will find this Man who receiveth a sinner like you at His throne of grace will not fail to receive you in heaven above.

"This Man receiveth sinners." I would like you to weigh this up and ponder it in your heart, and that you might be enabled to take courage in thinking upon it.

"Approach, my soul, the mercy seat,
Where Jesus answers prayer;
There humbly fall before His feet,
For none e'er perished there."

You will find of a truth, "This Man receiveth sinners" like you!
Amen.