

ALTO AND BASS

“He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent away empty.”

Luke 1:53

I commend to you the song of Mary for another reason—not only because she turned the Truth of God into poetry and song, but because she sang of mercies which were not yet visible to her. She had, with gladness, beheld the King of Glory in her own heart, although the promised Child was not yet born, so with exulting faith she sings, “My soul does magnify the Lord.” Brothers and Sisters, there are some of you who cannot even sing over a mercy when it is born, but here is a woman who sings over an unborn mercy. Oh, what a faith is this! If you have like precious faith, what a joy it will give to your lives! Is there nothing to sing about today? Then borrow a song from tomorrow! Sing of what is yet to be! Is this world dreary? Then think of the next! Is all around you dark? Then look upward, where they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light! “Yet a little while”—and we know not how short that, “little while,” will be—and, “He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” Then shall the children of the bride chamber rejoice with unspeakable joy, because the Bridegroom Himself has come and the day of His marriage has arrived! I beseech you, if you have been silent and hung your harps on the willows, take them down at once and sing and give praise to God for the glory which is yet to be revealed in us—the precious things that are laid up for them that love Him, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard—but the certainty of which He has revealed unto us by His Spirit. Sing unto the Lord concerning mercies yet unborn! Sing those sweet verses which I so often quote to you—

*“And a ‘new song’ is in my mouth,
To long-loved music set.
Glory to You for all the Grace
I have not tasted yet!
I have a heritage of joy
That yet I must not see—
The hand that bled to make it mine
Is keeping it for me.”*

There is something more than this in Mary’s song, for it is made up entirely of what God has done. Let me read you a verse or two—“He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden. He that is mighty has done to me great things. He has showed strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their seats, He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent away empty.” It is all about HIM, you see—all concerning what the Lord had done.

If I had to write a song about myself—humph!—well, that is all I could write! And if you had to write a song about yourself, it would be a wretched ditty if it spoke the truth—and I hope you would not want to sing it if it were not the truth! Some people’s songs are all about themselves, and very poor things they are. I heard of a Brother, the other day, who made a speech, and someone said to me, “Would you like a full report of his speech?” I said, “Yes,” for I was curious to hear what he would say. The friend said, “I was there and took a full report of his speech. Here it is.” He passed it over to me and there was nothing but one great capital letter, “I.” I have known some people who could both speak and sing that way, but that straight, stiff-backed letter, “I,” makes a very poor song. The less we sing about it, the better. There is no such note in the whole gamut, so let us never attempt to sing it. But when we sing, let us sing unto the Lord and let our song be concerning what He has done.

Where shall we begin, then? Let us begin with everlasting love. "I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you." Where shall we end? Well, there can be no end to this song, for the Lord's mercies are new every morning—great is His faithfulness and His loving kindness to His people never knows a pause, much less a close! Therefore, when we begin to sing of what He is doing, let us go on to sing it again, and again, and again, and again! And never let us spoil the tune by coming down to sing of what we have done, or offering any praise or glory to the sons of men.

Do you, then, children of God, see what an example Mary sets you? Turn the Truth of God into song—sing of unborn mercies—and sing of what the Lord has done and will do, world without end!

Now we come to consider the stanza of Mary's song which forms our text. There are two parts to her music. "He has filled the hungry with good things"—that is the air, "And the rich He has sent away empty"—that is the base. As we mean to play the bass softly and to give the other part more emphasis, we will take the bass first, and then, afterwards, we will have the alto.

1. First, then, here is THE BASS—"The rich He has sent away empty."

Are there any such people in the world in a spiritual sense? Yes. Every now and then we come across them. They are not truly rich—they are naked, poor and miserable—but they are rich in their own esteem and think they need nothing. They have kept the Law of God from their youth up, or, if they have not done that, they have done something quite as good. They are very full of grace and, sometimes, they wonder that they can hold so much! They are as good as ever they can be and they hardly know how to put up with the company of some Christians—especially those who are mourners in Zion and are lamenting their sins and their departure from God. They have no patience with these people! They stand by themselves, as did he who was called a Pharisee and who went up to the Temple to pray. And as they hear others making confession of sin, they proudly say, "Lord, we thank You that we are not as other men are." Very superior persons, indeed, are they—sometimes in education, sometimes in rank and station, sometimes in the weight of their moneybags—but anyhow, very superior indeed! They consider themselves the "upper-crust" of society. They are spiritually and morally rich before God—so they think.

What does the Lord do with such people? Mary says He sends them away empty. They verily thought that he would come out to them! They are so respectable that they are accustomed to be run after and they are greatly astonished that Jesus of Nazareth does not at once bow down to them and thank them for patronizing Him! But He sends them away empty. He wants nothing of them and while they are in such a condition, He has nothing for them. Off they must go! Does He not give them something as they go? No, He sends them away empty—giving them no comfort, no joy! He certainly does not flatter them, for His lips are lips of Truth—no encouragement—for His office is to pull down the mighty from their seats and to spoil the glory of all human boasting and make it bite the dust! He sends them away empty. Does this seem to you like hard treatment? Mary did not think so—she sang about it, she was glad of it! And so am I. "Why?" you ask. Why?

Well, first, how could Christ fill these people? They are already full! What can Christ do for a man who has no sin? He came on purpose to save His people from their sins—but if we haven't any, He has nothing to do with us. How shall Christ be bread to a man who is not hungry? How shall He be life to a man who has life in himself? How shall He be the Alpha and Omega of the salvation of a man who is the first and the last to himself and who begins and carries on his own salvation? No, a doctor does not go to heal the man who has no sickness—and Christ does not give His alms away to those who are not needy. When He makes a feast, it is for the poor and the hungry, for they cannot pay Him back except by giving Him their gratitude and their love. So it is right—since Christ cannot do anything for these rich people in their present condition—He sends them away empty.

And, next, what glory would Christ have if He were to fill them? To fill the full is no great achievement! To heal the healthy is no great triumph! To save those who are already saved is surely a superfluity! To give righteousness to those who are already righteous is ridiculous! And to find eternal life for those who have all the life they need is an absurdity! It is well, then, that those

who are so full should be sent away empty. They cannot be filled and if they could be, there would be no glory for Christ at all in filling them.

Next, supposing that Christ were to do something for them, then His riches and theirs would have to mix together. That would never do—human merits and Christ’s merits to be placed side by side as of equal value? Who thinks of sewing on a royal robe a rag picked off a dunghill? Yet, what else are those men doing who think that they can add their own righteousness to the righteousness of Christ? No, Sir, if you are rich and increased in goods, you would only have to take Christ’s goods into your store and lay them along with your own goods—and what a come-down that would be for the righteousness of Christ—to lie side by side with your own as though it were worth no more! You would need to put up over your door the name of your firm—“Self and Christ.” And salvation would have to be the work of yourself and the Savior, too—and you would want to share the glory of it. No, no! That can never be! Send that man away empty who has the impertinence to think that he can add something of his own to the merits of Christ, the only Savior!

Yet again, well may such people be sent away empty—and we may almost be glad of it and sing about it as we see what they do. If a man does not really want salvation and he reads the Bible or hears a sermon, he criticizes the style of it. When some gentlemen go out to dinner, they are very busy examining the table and the ornaments with which it is adorned. They watch the waiters and criticize every dish that is served. Oh, how daintily they taste everything, for they are connoisseurs and everything must be most exquisite to please them! But when you and I come home from a day’s work, we do not trouble about that kind of thing—we want something to eat and are grateful to have it. Those who have no appetite for Christ begin picking, first, at this and then at that, and even the Bible is not good enough for them—they want to have this amended and that altered! As for the poor sermons preached by mortal men—this does not suit them and the other does not suit them—nothing pleases them. There are some children who always pick over their food and their father says, “Ah, my boy, if you are sent to the workhouse for a week and get put on short commons, I’ll guarantee that you will eat that good meat! You will find an appetite then! So Christ, when these people are at His table turning over every morsel of the heavenly meat, sends them packing! And it serves them right, for they spoil the banquet for those who would enjoy it.

Beside that, they not only criticize, but they also quibble. Preach the Doctrines of Grace to a man who never had a sense of sin and he says, “I don’t believe in Calvinism.” Tell him of the Sovereignty of God, which is a sweet morsel to God’s own people, and he says “I, I, I—I don’t believe in that doctrine. I think there is some merit in the creature—some claim in fallen humanity to the goodness of God.” Solomon said, “To the hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet,” but to this man, who is so full of conceit, there is nothing in the Gospel that is good enough—so he puffs at this and sneers at that, and “pshaws” at the other—and if you put the butter in a lordly dish, such as the children like to see, he will not have it! Therefore Christ will not have him—He sends him away empty.

I do not know whether it is not the very best thing that could happen to some of those who think themselves rich that they should be sent away empty, for if they were once to feel their emptiness, they would then come to Christ in quite another style—and then would they join in singing Mary’s song, “He has filled the hungry with good things.” If any of you are satisfied with your own goodness—and perhaps there are some such people here—I would remind you of what the farmer said to Mr. Hervey. When Mr. Hervey had become the rector of the parish, he went round and spoke to his parishioners. And he asked a farmer, “What have we to overcome in order to get to Heaven?” “Well, Sir,” he replied, “you are a clergyman and I think that you ought to tell me, and not ask me to tell you that.” “Well,” said Mr. Hervey, “I think that the most difficult thing to overcome is sinful self.” “Excuse me,” said the farmer, “but I have found one thing harder than that.” “What is that?” enquired Mr. Hervey. “To overcome righteous self,” answered the man. And that, I believe, is a most solemn Truth of God! In the case of some of you, I am a deal more afraid of your self-righteousness than I am of your unrighteousness! One thing I know, Christ thinks more of our sins than He does of our righteousness, for He gave Himself for our sins—I never heard that He gave Himself for our righteousness. By His most precious blood, He has put away the sins of all who trust Him. But take care that your self-righteousness does not come in between you and the Savior, for if it does, you will be among the rich whom He will send away empty!

Empty your pockets and make yourselves poor! I do not mean in money, but in spirit. Get down to spiritual poverty and beggary, for that is the only way to attain spiritual riches!

So much for the bass—"The rich He has sent away empty."

II. Now we come to THE ALTO of this song of Mary—"He has filled the hungry with good things." I have not many minutes left, so I will pack my thoughts closely.

First, here is the chosen company, with good things. "Who are the hungry? Well, they are men and women full of desires for spiritual blessings. They are always desiring good things. They do not say much about what they think, but they have great longings for many things that they do not yet possess. Are you, dear Friend, desiring to be saved? Are you desiring to be reconciled to God? Are you desiring to look unto Christ by faith? Are you desiring to be sanctified? Are you desiring to grow in Grace? Then you are among the hungry ones.

But hunger is more than a desire—it is an appetite—it is a craving born of a stern necessity. A man must eat, or he must die. Therefore hunger is not a desire that he can lay aside. Have you come into such a condition of heart that you must have Christ or die? That you must have mercy or be lost? That you must be forgiven or be cast into Hell? And do you begin, now, to really hunger and thirst after the righteousness which is in Christ? If so, you are among the people whom He will fill with good things! The hungry man sometimes becomes a fainting man. He may tighten his belt to try to stop the gnawing of the inward wolf, but it cannot be stopped, and he gets to feel as if he had no strength and were ready to be dissolved. Do you feel like that? Do you need mercy so badly that you hardly know how to ask for it, you have become so weak, you have sunk down so low? Well, I am glad of it! You are among the very first of those whom Christ will fill with good things!

The hungry man is often a despised man. They say of such a person, "Ah, he has a lean and hungry look!" People do not like to associate with men who are very hungry, so they say, "Ah, poor beggar! I do not want to be where he is." You have heard that said, have you not? And that is just what men say of those who are spiritually hungry. "Very poor company is that man. The other day, when he was sitting in the room where we were all making fun, he was sighing all the time. There is no merriment about him! He sits by himself in the corner, or he gets into his own room and he begins crying, and says that he is a lost man if God does not have mercy upon him." Ah, that is the man for me! I would sit up all night, seven nights running, I think, to meet with people of that kind! They are the sort for whom Christ died, they are the sort Christ loves to feed—"He has filled the hungry with good things."

And you know that when a man gets to be very poor and hungry, not only do people think little of him, but he generally gets to think very little of himself. When the bread is out of a man, the spirit is out of him, too, and he goes groping up and down the streets to try to find a place where he may beg a bit of bread. He is "down at the heel," men say. Is there anyone here who is "down at the heel" spiritually, altogether done for? Poor creature, you are the one Christ came to save! You are the very sort for whom the banquet of love is spread! Your emptiness is that for which Christ is seeking—"He has filled the hungry with good things." He has been doing this ever since Mary sang of it—He has done it in the case of many who are now present and He is ready to do it for you. Only open your mouth wide that He may fill it! Put your trust in Him and you shall be filled with good things! That is the first part of this sweet song—the chosen company—"the hungry."

Note, next, the choice meat. Mary might have said, "He has filled the hungry with the best of things." See what "good things" Christ puts into a hungry man's mouth. "Lord," he says, "I am a sinner. I need pardon." Christ answers, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions and, as a cloud, your sins." Is not that good meat to put in the hungry man's mouth? "Lord," he says, "I need renewal, I need a change of heart." The Lord replies, "A new heart, also, will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Certainly that is a good thing with which to fill his mouth! "But, Lord, if I am saved, I am so weak that I do not know how I shall stand." "Your shoes shall be iron and brass; and as your days, so shall your strength be." Is not that a good morsel with which to fill his mouth? "Ah, Lord!" he says, "I am prone to wander and I fear that I shall go astray

again." "I will put My fear in your heart, that you shall not depart from Me." Oh, is not that a blessed morsel to fill his mouth? There is no need which a poor destitute sinner can have which is not provided for in Christ! Listen, poor hungry sinner! There is laid up in Christ all the food that you need between here and Heaven—the best of food—the very food that your sickly fainting spirit needs is all stored up in Him! How sweet is this song! "He has filled the hungry with good things."

The third thing to be noted is this, the completeness of the supply. the hungry with good things." It is a good thing to give a hungry man a bit and a sup just to stay his stomach for a while, but that is not Christ's way of feeding the famishing—"He has

filled the hungry with good things." I appeal to those of you here present who were once

hungry and who came to Christ—how did Christ treat you, my Brothers and Sisters? Did He give you just a little scrap of spiritual food, or has He filled you with good things? I think I hear you say, "Sir, now I have Christ to live upon, I need nothing else. There is nothing outside the great circle of Christ that I could possibly wish for—He is all I need, all I desire, all I can imagine, all for life and all for death, all for this world and all for the world that is to come." I ask you—"Are you perfectly satisfied with Christ?" "Yes!" you say, "I need none but Christ. He is my All-in-All." Ah, my Brother, my Sister! I, also, can speak as you do. There is an intense enjoyment in the man who has received Christ. He has not only enough, but sometimes he so overflows with satisfaction that he does not know how to tell his tale to others and he longs for the time when he shall get to Heaven—when the strings of his tongue shall be loosed and he will stop the angels as they go down the golden streets and say, "Please, bright spirit, stay a while and let me tell you what Christ did for me, for He has filled me to the brim with His own dear Self and His own infinite love! He has fed me till I need no more." Is not that a blessed word? "He has

filled the hungry with good things."

Now, lastly, this song tells us of the glorious Benefactor. "HE has filled the hungry with good things." It is God that does it all! He provides the feast. He invites the guests. He brings them to the table. He gives them the appetite, He gives them the power to receive what He has prepared. It is He who fills the hungry with good things. I am so glad of that, for I know some poor hungry souls that cannot even feed themselves—but the Lord can fill them with good things. We have brought them to the table laden with spiritual dainties, yet their soul has abhorred all manner of meat and they have drawn near to the gates of death. But when no preacher can feed you, God can! And when your very soul seems to turn away, even from heavenly comforts, till you say with the Psalmist, "My soul refused to be comforted," the Lord, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, can bring the Truth of God home to your heart till you say, "He has done it! He has done it! He has filled the hungry with good things."

If I had the time and the power, I would like to take that word, He—HE—HE, and speak it as with a trumpet voice—"HE has filled the hungry with good things!" Who made the earth and the heavens and filled them with light and glory? The answer is, "He has done it." It was the Lord alone who redeemed His people from their sins, who paid the purchase price, who wrestled with their adversaries and trod them under His feet as grapes are trod in the winepress! "He has done it. HE has done it!" Unto His name be all the praise! Who began the good work in you, my Brother, my Sister in Christ? Who has carried it on up to now? Who will perfect it? Like thunder, I hear the answer from all the redeemed who are before the Throne of God—"HE, HE, HE has done it, and unto His name be honor and glory forever and ever!"

Go to Him, thirsty ones! Go to Him by a simple, childlike faith, and you shall then come and join with us in the song, "He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent away empty." The Lord bless you, for His dear Son's sake! Amen.