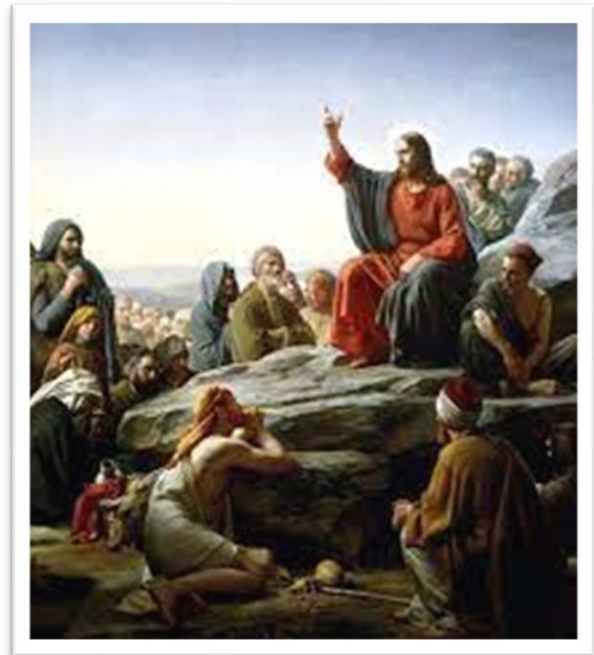


## **Sermon on the Mountain Near Meroz. The Daughters of Lais**

Next morning Jesus went again to the mountain and there during the whole forenoon delivered a grand discourse similar to that known as the Sermon on the Mount. The multitude present was great, and food was distributed: bread and honey, along with fish taken from the ponds fed by the little brooks that watered the region. Jesus had by means of the disciples procured provisions for the poor. Toward the end of the discourse, He alluded again to the one talent that, as children of the handmaid, they had received and buried, and He inveighed severely against the Pharisees for their hatred toward them, asking why they had not long ago led these people back to the truth. His words vexed the Pharisees, and they began to retort. They reproached Jesus for allowing His disciples so much liberty, especially on the score of fasting, washing, purifications, the Sabbath, the shunning of publicans and the different sects. It was not in this way, they said, the children of the Prophets and the Scribes used to live.

Jesus replied in the words of the Commandment of fraternal love: "Love God above all things and thy neighbor as thyself. That is the first Commandment!" and He told the disciples that they should learn to practice it, instead of covering up its abuse by means of exterior practices. Jesus spoke somewhat figuratively; consequently, Philip and Thaddeus said to Him: "Master, they have not understood Thee." Then Jesus explained Himself quite significantly. He commiserated the poor, ignorant, sinful people whom they, the Pharisees, with all their outward observance of the Law, had allowed to go to destruction, and He ended by boldly declaring that they who acted so should have no part in His Kingdom. He then went down the mountain to His inn, which was one-half hour from the scene of the sermon and another from the city. He met all along the way, on litters under tents, a great number of sick of all kinds patiently awaiting His coming. Many of them had come too late for the first cures. They belonged to the country far around. Jesus cured them, addressing to them at the same time words of consolation and exhortation to a change of life.

A pagan widow of Naim, called Lais, was also here waiting for Jesus. She had



come to implore His aid in behalf of her two daughters, Sabia and Athalia. They were in a fearful manner possessed by the devil, and were at home in Naim confined to their respective apartments. They were perfectly furious. They dashed themselves here and there, they bit their own flesh, and struck wildly around them; no one ventured to approach them. At other times their members were contracted by cramps, and they fell to the ground pale and unconscious. Their mother, accompanied by handmaids and menservants, had come to Jesus for help. She was waiting at a distance eagerly desirous of His approach, but to her disappointment, she saw Him always turning to others. The poor mother could not restrain her eagerness, but cried out from time to time as He drew near: "Ah, Lord, have mercy on me!" but Jesus appeared not to hear her. The women near her suggested that she should say: "Have mercy on my daughters!" since she herself was not a sufferer. She replied: "They are my own flesh. In having mercy on me, He will have mercy on them also!" and again she uttered the same cry. At last Jesus turned and addressed her: "It is proper that I should break bread to the children of My own household before attending to strangers." The mother replied: "Lord, Thou art right. I will wait or even come again, if Thou canst not help me today, for I am not worthy of Thy assistance!" Jesus had, however, finished His work of healing, and the cured, singing canticles of praise, were going off with their beds. Jesus had turned away from the disconsolate mother and appeared about to retire. Seeing this, the poor woman grew desperate. "Ah!" she thought, "He is not going to help me!" But as the words flashed through her mind, Jesus turned toward her and said: "Woman, what askest thou of Me?" She cast herself veiled at His feet and answered: "Lord, help me! My two daughters at Naim are tormented by the devil. I know that Thou canst help them if Thou wilt, for all things are possible to Thee." Jesus responded: "Return to thy home! Thy daughters are coming to meet thee. But purify thyself! The sins of the parents are upon these children." These last words Jesus spoke to her privately. She replied: "Lord, I have already long wept my sin. What shall I do?" Then Jesus told her that she should get rid of her unjustly acquired goods, mortify her body, pray, fast, give alms, and comfort the sick. She promised with many tears to do all that He suggested, and then went away full of joy. Her two daughters were the fruit of an illicit connection. She had three sons born in lawful wedlock, but they lived apart from their mother, who still retained property belonging to them. She was very rich and, notwithstanding her repentance, lived, like most people of her class, a life of luxury. The daughters were confined in separate chambers. While Jesus was speaking with their mother, they fell unconscious, and Satan went out of them in the form of a black vapor. Weeping vehemently and

quite changed, they called their female attendants, and informed them that they were cured. When they learned that their mother had gone to the Prophet of Nazareth, they set out to meet her, accompanied by many of their acquaintances. They met her at about an hour's distance from Naim and related all that had happened to them. The mother then went on to the city, but the daughters with their maids and servants proceeded straight forward to Meroz. They wished to present themselves to Jesus who, they had heard, was going to teach there again the next morning. During the healing of the sick, Manahem, the blind disciple of Korea, who had been restored to sight and whom Jesus had sent on a message to Lazarus, returned from Bethania with the two nephews of Joseph of Arimathea. Jesus gave them an interview. The holy women had sent by them money and gifts of various kinds to Jesus. Dina the Samaritan had visited the holy women at Capharnaum, bringing with her a rich contribution. Veronica and Johanna Chusa had also visited Mary. On their return journey they called to see Magdalen, whom they found very much changed. She was depressed in spirits, her folly apparently undergoing a struggle with her good inclinations. The holy women took Dina with them to Bethania. There was at this epoch a rich, aged widow who joined Martha's little band and gave all she possessed for the benefit of the young community.

When the Pharisees invited Jesus to a dinner, they asked Him whether His disciples, young, inexperienced men, some of them quite rustic and unaccustomed to the society of the learned, should also be invited. Jesus answered: "Yes! For whoever invites Me, invites the members of My household also; and he that rejects them likewise rejects Me." At these words, they bade Him bring the disciples with Him. All repaired to the public house in the city, where Jesus still taught and explained parables.

The property upon which Lazarus had established the inn near Meroz, consisted of a beautiful field and numerous orchards interspersed with charming groves. Some of his servants lived there to attend to the fruit and provide for its sale. At this time they had charge also of the inn. At the last meeting of Jesus with Lazarus at Ennon, it had been agreed that Jesus should tarry for some time in these parts. The holy women had, in consequence, come thither to get the inn in order, and the people around the country had been notified to expect Jesus.

On the following morning, before going again to the mountain, Jesus taught at the fountain in Meroz, and again reproached the Pharisees for the little care they took of the people. After that He ascended the mountain and delivered an instruction similar to that known as the Sermon on the Mount. Before taking leave of the people, He once more gave an explanation of the

buried talent. Some of His hearers had already been three days encamped on the mountain. Those in need had been placed apart from the rest and were provided with food and other necessaries by the disciples. Judas' uncle, Simeon of Iscariot, a devout, old man, dark complexioned and vigorous, entreated Jesus to go to Iscariot, and Jesus promised to do so. When He went down the mountain, He found some sick awaiting Him. They were still able to walk. Jesus cured them. This took place on the road between the inn and Lazarus' property, at a little distance below the place where the disciples had distributed food to the people.

On the same spot upon which the pagan woman Lais of Naim had knelt yesterday at Jesus' feet praying for her sick daughters, were today those daughters, now both cured, awaiting the coming of Jesus. They were named Athalia and Sabia, and were accompanied by their maids and men servants. With all their attendants, they cast themselves down before Jesus, saying: "Lord, we esteemed ourselves unworthy to listen to Thy instructions, therefore we waited here to thank Thee for freeing us from the power of the evil one." Jesus commanded them to rise. He commended their mother's patience, humility, and faith, for as a stranger she had waited until He had broken bread to His own household. But now, He continued, she too belonged to His household, for she had recognized the God of Israel in His mercy. The Heavenly Father had sent Him to break bread to all that believed in His mission and brought forth fruits of penance. Then He ordered the disciples to bring food, which He gave to the maidens and all their attendants—to each a piece of bread and a piece of fish—delivering to them at the same time an instruction thereon full of deep significance. After that He went on with the disciples to the inn. One of the maidens was twenty, the other five and twenty years old. Their sickness and the confinement in which they lived had made them pale and wan.