

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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UNBINDING LAZARUS.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 20TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

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“And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”—John xi. 43, 44.

IN many things our Lord Jesus stands alone as a worker. No other can unite his voice with the fiat which says, “Lazarus, come forth.” Yet in certain points of gracious operation the Master associates his servants with him, so that when Lazarus has come forth he says *to them*, “Loose him, and let him go.” In the raising of the dead he is alone, and therein majestic and divine: in the loosing of the bound he is associated with them, and remains still majestic; but his more prominent feature is condescension. How exceedingly kind it is of our Lord Jesus to permit his disciples to do some little thing in connection with his great deeds, so that they may be “workers together with him.” Our Lord as frequently as possible associated his disciples with himself; of course, they could not aid him in presenting an atoning sacrifice, yet it was their honour that they had said, “Let us go that we may die with him,” and that in their love they resolved to go with him to prison and to death. Our Lord understood the fickleness of their character, yet he knew that they were sincere in their desire to be associated with him in all his life-story whatever it might be. Hence, when he afterwards rode into Jerusalem in triumph, he alone was saluted with Hosannas; but he sent two of his disciples to bring the ass on which he rode, and they cast their garments upon the colt and they set Jesus thereon, and as he went they spread their clothes in the way. Thus they contributed to his lowly pomp, and shared in the exultation of the royal day. Further on, when he would keep the feast, he expressly dwells upon it that he would keep it with them; for he said, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover *with you* before I suffer.” He sent Peter and John to prepare that passover, he directed them to the large upper room furnished, and there he bade them make ready. Anything that they could do they were allowed to do.

Their Lord was willing to have led them further still ; but through weakness they stopped short. In the garden he bade them watch with him on that dreadful night, and he sought sympathy from them.

“Backward and forward, thrice he ran,  
As if he sought some help from man.”

He cried in sorrowful disappointment, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” Ah, no! They could go to the brink of the abyss with him, but they could not descend into its deeps. He must tread the winepress alone, and of the people there must be none with him ; yet as far as they could go he disdained not their dear society. He allowed them according to their capacity to drink of his cup, and to be baptized with his baptism ; and if their fellowship with him in his sufferings went no farther, it was not because he warned them back, but because they had not the strength to follow. According to his own judgment they were intimately associated with him, for he said to them, “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.”

Beloved, our Jesus Christ still delights to associate us with him as far as our feebleness and folly will permit. In his present work of bringing sinners to himself, he counts it a part of his reward that we should be labourers together with him. In his working people he beholds the travail of his soul as well as in the sinners whom they bring to him ; thus, he has a double reward, and is as much glorified in the love, and pity, and zeal of his servants as in the harvest which they reap. As a father smiles to see his little children imitating him, and endeavouring to assist him in his work, so is Jesus pleased to see our lowly efforts for his honour. It is his joy to see the eyes which he has opened weeping with him over the impenitent, and to hear the tongue which he has loosed speaking in prayer and in the preaching of the gospel ; yea, to see any of the members which he has restored and healed occupied as members of righteousness in his service. Jesus is glad to save sinners at all, but most of all glad to save them by the means of those already saved. Thus he blesses the prodigal sons and the servants of the household at the same moment. He gives to the lost salvation, and upon his own called and chosen ones he puts the honour of being used for the grandest purposes under heaven. It is more honourable to save a soul from death than to rule an empire. Such honour all the saints may have.

The chief subject of this morning's discourse is our association with Christ in gracious labour ; but we must on the road consider other themes which lead up to it. First, I would call your attention to *a memorable miracle* which was wrought by our Lord in the burying-place at Bethany ; secondly, I would set before you *a singular spectacle*, for in Lazarus we see a living man wearing the wrappings of the dead ; thirdly, we will learn something from *a timely assistance*, which the friends around lent to the risen man after the Lord had said, “Loose him, and let him go” ; and then by way of conclusion, we will note *a practical hint* which this whole subject gives to those who are willing to hear what Christ their Lord will speak to them. Oh, that the Spirit of God may make us quick of understanding to perceive the mind of the Lord,

and then diligent of heart to carry out his will! Come, O blessed Spirit, help thy servant at this hour!

I. First, then, this chapter records A MEMORABLE MIRACLE. Perhaps that writer is correct who speaks of the raising of Lazarus as the most remarkable of all our Lord's mighty works. There is no measuring miracles, for they are all displays of the infinite; but in some respects the raising of Lazarus stands at the head of the wonderful series of miracles with which our Lord astonished and instructed the people. Yet I am not in error when I assert that it is a type of what the Lord Jesus is constantly doing at this hour in the realm of mind and spirit. Did he raise the naturally dead? So doth he still raise the spiritually dead. Did he bring back a body from corruption? So doth he still deliver men from loathsome sins. The life-giving miracle of grace is as truly astounding as the quickening miracle of power. As this was in some respects a more remarkable resurrection than the raising of Jairus's daughter, or of the young man at the gate of Nain, so there are certain conversions and regenerations which are to the observing mind more astonishing than others.

I notice the memorableness of this miracle in *the subject of it*, because the man had been dead four days. To give life to one of whom his own sister said, "Lord, by this time he stinketh," was a deed fragrant with divine power. Corruption had set in, but he who is the resurrection and the life stayed and reversed the process. Probably the sisters had perceived the traces of decay upon the body of their beloved brother before they buried him, for it is more than supposable that they delayed the funeral as long as possible under an undefined hope that perhaps their Lord would appear upon the scene. In that warm climate the ravages of decay are extremely rapid, and before many hours the loving sisters were compelled to admit, as Abraham had done before them, that they must bury their dead out of their sight. It was their full conviction that the terrible devourings of corruption had commenced. What then can be done? When a man has newly fallen asleep in death, and every vein and artery is in its place, and every separate organ is still perfect, it might seem possible for the life-flood again to flow. It somewhat resembles an engine which was but lately in full action, and though it is now motionless, the valves, and wheels, and bands, are still there; only kindle anew the fire, and reapply the motive force, and the machinery will speedily begin to work. But when corruption comes, every valve is displaced, every wheel is broken, every band is severed, the very metal itself is eaten away. What can be done now? Surely it were an easier task to make a new man altogether out of the earth than to take this poor corrupted corpse which has turned to worms' meat and make it live again. This was the stupendous miracle of divine power which our glorious Lord performed upon his friend Lazarus. Now, there are some men who are symbolized by this case: they are not only devoid of all spiritual life, but corruption has set in; their character has become abominable, their language is putrid, their spirit is loathsome. The pure mind desires to have them put out of sight; they cannot be endured in any decent society. They are so far gone from original righteousness as to be an offence to all, and it does not seem possible that ever they should be restored to purity, honesty, or

hope. When the Lord in infinite compassion comes to deal with them and makes them to live, then the most sceptical are obliged to confess, "This is the finger of God!" What can it be else? Such a profane wretch become a believer! Such a blasphemer a man of prayer! Such a proud, conceited talker, receive the kingdom as a little child! Surely God himself must have wrought this marvel! Now is fulfilled the word of the Lord by Ezekiel,—“And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves.” We bless our God that he does thus quicken the dry bones, whose hope was lost. However far gone a man may be, he cannot be beyond the reach of the Lord’s right arm of mighty mercy. The Lord can change the vilest of the vile into the most holy of the holy! Blessed be his name, we have seen him do this, and therefore we have cheering hope for the worst of men!

The next notable point about this miracle is *the manifest human weakness of its worker*. He who had to deal with this dead man was himself a man. I do not know of any passage of Scripture wherein the manhood of Christ is more frequently manifested than in this narrative. The Godhead is, of course, eminently conspicuous in the resurrection of Lazarus, but the Lord seemed as if he designedly at the same time set his manhood to the front. The Pharisees said, according to the forty-seventh verse, “What do we? for *this man* doeth many miracles.” They are to be blamed for denying his Godhead, but not for dwelling upon his manhood, for every part of the singular scene before us made it conspicuous. When our Lord had seen Mary’s tears, we read that he groaned in spirit and was troubled. Thus he showed the sorrows and the sympathies of a man. We cannot forget those memorable words, “Jesus wept.” Who but a man should weep? Weeping is a human speciality. Jesus never seems to be more completely bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh than when he weeps. Next, our Lord made an enquiry—“Where have ye laid him?” He veils his omniscience: as a man he seeks information—where is the body of his dear departed friend? Even as Mary in after days said about himself, “Tell me where thou hast laid him,” so does the Lord Jesus ask for information as a man who knows not. As if to show his manhood even more fully, when they tell him where Lazarus is entombed he goes that way. He needed not to go: he might have spoken a word where he was, and the dead would have risen. Could he not as easily have wrought at a distance as near at hand? Being man, “Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave.” When he has reached the spot he sees a cave whose mouth is closed by a huge stone, and now he seeks human assistance. He cries, “Take ye away the stone.” Why, surely he who could raise the dead could have rolled away the stone with the self-same word! Yet, as if needing help from those about him, the man Christ Jesus reminds us again of Mary at his own sepulchre, saying, “Who shall roll us away the stone?” That done, our Lord lifts up his eyes to heaven, and addresses the Father in mingled prayer and thanksgiving. How like a man is all this! He takes the suppliant’s place. He speaks with God as a man speaketh with his friend, but still as a man. Did not this condescending revelation of the manhood make the miracle all the more remarkable? The time came when the flame of the Godhead flashed



forth from the unconsumed bush of the manhood. The voice of him who wept was heard in the chambers of death-shade, and forth came the soul of Lazarus to live again in the body. "The weakness of God" proved itself to be stronger than death and mightier than the grave. It is a parable of our own case as workers. Sometimes we see the human side of the gospel, and wonder whether it can do many mighty works. When we tell the story, we fear that it will appear to the people as a thrice-told tale. We wonder how it can be that truth so simple, so homely, so common should have any special power about it. Yet it is so. Out of the foolishness of preaching the wisdom of God shines forth. The glory of the eternal God is seen in that gospel which we preach in much trembling and infirmity. Let us therefore glory in our infirmity, because the power of God doth all the more evidently rest upon us. Let us not despise our day of small things, nor be dismayed because we are manifestly so feeble. This work is not for our honour, but for the glory of God, and any circumstance which tends to make that glory more evident is to be rejoiced in.

Let us consider for a few moments *the instrumental cause of this resurrection*. Nothing was used by our Lord but his own word of power. Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" He simply repeated the dead man's name, and added two commanding words. This was a simple business enough. Dear friends, a miracle seems all the greater when the means used are apparently feeble and little adapted to the working of so great a result. It is so in the salvation of men. It is marvellous that such poor preaching should convert such great sinners. Many are turned unto the Lord by the simplest, plainest, most unadorned preaching of the gospel. They hear little, but that little is from the lip of Jesus. Many converts find Christ by a single short sentence. The divine life is borne into their hearts upon the wings of a brief text. The preacher owned no eloquence, he made no attempt at it; but the Holy Spirit spoke through him with a power which eloquence could not rival. Thus said the Lord "Ye dry bones live"; and they did live. I delight to preach my Master's gospel in the plainest terms. I would speak still more simply if I could. I would borrow the language of Daniel concerning Belshazzar's robe of scarlet and his chain of gold, and I would say to rhetoric, "Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another." The power to quicken the dead lieth not in the wisdom of words but in the Spirit of the living God. The voice is Christ's voice, and the word is the word of him who is the resurrection and the life, and therefore men live by it. Let us rejoice that it is not needful that you and I should become orators in order that the Lord Jesus should speak by us: let the Spirit of God rest upon us, and we shall be endowed with power from on high: so that even the spiritually dead shall through us hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.

*The result* of the Lord's working must not be passed over, for it is a main element of wonder in this miracle. Lazarus did come forth and that immediately. The thunder of Christ's voice was attended by the lightning of his divine power, and forthwith life flashed into Lazarus and he came forth. Bound as he was, the power which had enabled him to live enabled him to shuffle forth from the ledge of rock whereon he lay, and there he stood with nothing of death about him but his grave-

clothes. He quitted the close air of the sepulchre and returned to know once more the things which are done under the sun; *and that at once.* To me it is one of the great glories of the gospel that it does not require weeks and months to quicken men and make new creatures of them; salvation can come to them at once. The man who stepped into this Tabernacle this morning steeped in rebellion against his God, and apparently impervious to divine truth, may nevertheless go down those steps with his sins forgiven, and with a new spirit imparted to him, in the strength of which he shall begin to live unto God as he never lived before. Do you speak of a nation being born at once, as if it were impossible? It is possible with God. The Divine Power can send a flash of life all round the world at any instant to quicken myriads of his chosen. We are dealing now with God, not with men. Man must have time to prepare his machinery, and get it into going order; but it is not so with the Lord. We, on our part, must seek after a preacher, and find for him a place wherein the people may be gathered; but when the Lord Jesus works, straightway the deed is done, with or without the preacher, and inside or outside the place of assembly! If you and I had to feed five thousand, we should need to grind the corn at the mill, and bake the bread in the oven, and then we should be a long time in bringing the loaves in baskets; but the Master takes the barley cakes and breaks, and as he breaks the food is multiplied. Anon he handles the fish, and lo, it seems as if a shoal had been in his hands instead of "a few small fishes." Behold! the vast multitude receives refreshment from the little stock which has been so abundantly increased. Trust ye in God, my brethren. In all your work of love, trust in the unseen power which lay at the back of the manhood of Christ, and still lies at the back of the simple gospel which we preach. The everlasting word may seem to be weak and feeble; it may groan and weep, and seem as if it could do no more; but it can raise the dead, and raise them at once. Be ye sure of this.

*The effect* which this miracle produced upon those who looked on was very remarkable, for many believed in the Lord Jesus. Besides this, the miracle of raising Lazarus was so unquestioned and unquestionable a fact that it brought the Pharisees to a point—they would now make an end of Christ. They had huffed and puffed at his former miracles; but this one had struck such a blow that in their wrath they determined that he should die. No doubt this miracle was the immediate cause of the crucifixion of Jesus: it marked a point of decision when men must either believe in Christ, or become his deadly foes. Oh, brethren, if the Lord be with us, we shall see multitudes believing through Jesus; and if the rage of the enemy becomes thereby the more intense, let us not fear it: there will come a last decisive struggle, and mayhap it shall be brought on by some amazing display of the divine power in the conversion of the chief of sinners. Let us hope so; let us not be afraid that Armageddon should be fought, for it will end in victory. We shall see greater things than these!

II. Secondly, I beg you to observe A SINGULAR SPECTACLE. A notable miracle was unquestionably wrought; but it required a finishing touch.

The man was wholly raised, but not wholly freed. See, here is *a living*

*man in the garments of death!* That napkin and other grave-clothes were altogether congruous with death, but they were much out of place when Lazarus began again to live. It is a wretched sight to see a living man wearing his shroud. Yet we have seen in this Tabernacle hundreds of times people quickened by Divine grace with their grave-clothes still upon them. Such was their condition that unless you observed carefully you would think them still dead; and yet within them the lamp of heavenly life was burning. Some said, "He is dead, look at his garments;" but the more spiritual cried, "He is not dead, but these bands must be loosed." It is a singular spectacle: a living man hampered with the cerements of death!

Moreover, he was *a moving man bound hand and foot*. How he moved I do not know. Some of the old writers thought that he glided, as it were, through the air, and that this was part of the miracle. I think he may have been so bound that though he could not freely walk yet he could shuffle along like a man in a sack. I know that I have seen souls bound and yet moving; moving intensely in one direction, and yet not capable of stirring an inch in another. Have you not seen a man so truly alive that he wept, he mourned, he groaned over sin; but yet he could not believe in Christ, but seemed bound hand and foot as to faith? I have seen him give up his sin determinedly, and crush a bad habit under his foot, and yet he could not lay hold on a promise or receive a hope. Lazarus was free enough in one way, for he came out of the tomb, but the blinding napkin was about his head; and even so it is with many a quickened sinner, for when you try to show him some cheering truth he cannot see it.

Moreover, here was *a repulsive object, but yet attractive*. Mary and Martha must have been charmed to see their brother, even though wrapped in grave-clothes. He startled all the assembly, and yet they were drawn to him. A man fresh from the sepulchre robed in a winding-sheet is a sight one would go a long way not to see, but such was Lazarus; yet a man restored from death it were worth while to travel round the world to look upon, and such was Lazarus. Mary and Martha felt their hearts dancing within them since their dear brother was alive. Notwithstanding the repulsiveness of the spectacle, it must have charmed them beyond anything they had seen except the Lord himself. So have we come near to a poor sinner; it was enough to frighten anybody to hear his groans, and to see his weeping, but yet he was so dear to every true heart that we loved to be with him. I have sometimes spoken with broken-hearted sinners, and they have pretty nearly broken my heart; and yet, when they have gone out of the room, I have wished to see a thousand like them. Poor creatures, they fill us with sorrow, and yet flood us with joy.

Moreover, here was *a man strong, and yet helpless*. He was strong enough to come forth from his grave, and yet he could not take the napkin from his own head, for his hands were bound, and he could not go to his house, for his feet were swathed. Unless some kind hand unbound him he would remain a living mummy. He had strength sufficient to quit the grave, but he could not be quit of his grave-clothes. So have we seen men strong, for the Spirit of God has been in them, and has moved them mightily; they have been passionately in earnest even



to agony in one direction, yet the newborn life has been so feeble in other ways that they seemed to be mere babes in swaddling clothes. They have not been able to enjoy the liberty of Christ, nor enter into communion with Christ, nor work for Christ. They have been bound hand and foot: work and progress have alike been beyond them. This seems a strange sequel to a miracle. The bands of death loosed, but not the bands of linen; motion given, but not movement of hand or foot; strength bestowed, but not the power to undress himself. Such anomalies are common in the world of grace.

III. This brings us to consider A TIMELY ASSISTANCE which you and I are called upon to render. O for wisdom to learn our duty, and grace to do it at once.

Let us consider *what are these bands which often bind newly regenerated sinners?* Some of them are blindfolded by the napkin about their head;—they are very *ignorant*, sadly devoid of spiritual perception, and withal the eye of faith is darkened. Yet the eye is there, and Christ has opened it; and it is the business of the servant of God to remove the napkin which bandages it, by teaching the truth, explaining it, and clearing up difficulties. This is a simple thing to do, but exceedingly necessary. Now that they have life we shall teach them to purpose. Besides that, they are bound hand and foot, so that they are compelled to *inaction*; we can show them how to work for Jesus. Sometimes these bands are those of *sorrow*, they are in an awful terror about the past; we have to unbind them by showing that the past is blotted out. They are wrapped about by many a yard of *doubt*, mistrust, anguish, and remorse. “Loose them, and let them go.”

Another hindrance is the band of *fear*. “Oh,” says the poor soul, “I am such a sinner that God must punish me for my sin.” Tell him the grand doctrine of substitution. Unwrap this cerement by the assurance that Jesus took our sin, and that “by his stripes we are healed.” It is wonderful what liberty comes by that precious truth when it is well understood. The penitent soul fears that Jesus will refuse its prayer; assure it that he will in nowise cast out any that come to him. Let fear be taken from the soul by the promises of Scripture, by our testimony to their truth, and by the Spirit bearing witness to the doctrine which we endeavour to impart.

Souls are very often bound with the grave-clothes of *prejudice*. They used to think so and so before conversion, and they are very apt to carry their dead thoughts into their new life. Go and tell them that things are not what they seem: that old things have passed away, and behold all things have become new. The days of their ignorance God winked at, but now they must change their minds about everything, and no more judge according to the sight of the eyes and the hearing of the ears. Some of them are bound with the grave-clothes of evil *habit*. It is a noble work to aid a drunkard to unwind the accursed bands which prevent his making the slightest progress towards better things. Let us tear off every band from ourselves that we may the more readily help *them* to be free. The bonds of evil habits may still remain upon men that have received the divine life until those habits are pointed out to them and the evil of them is shown and so they are helped by precept, prayer, and example to free themselves. Who among us would wish Lazarus to con-



tinue wearing his shroud? Who would wish to see a regenerate man falling into ill habits? When the Lord quickens men the main point of the business is secured, and then you and I can come in to loose every bond which would hamper and hinder the free action of the divine life.

*But why are these bandages left?* Why did not the miracle which raised Lazarus also loosen his grave-clothes? I answer because *our Lord Jesus is always economical of miracles*. False wonders are plentiful: true miracles are few and far between. In the Church of Rome such miracles as they claim are usually a lavish waste of power. When St. Swithin made it rain for forty days that his corpse might not be carried into the church it was much ado about very little; when St. Denis walked a thousand miles with his head in his hands one is apt to ask why he could not have journeyed quite as well if he had set it on his neck; and when another saint crossed the sea on a table-cloth it would appear to have been an improvement if he had borrowed a boat. Rome can afford to be free with her counterfeit coin. The Lord Jesus never works a miracle unless there is an object to be gained which could not be obtained in any other way. When the enemy said, "Command that these stones be made bread," our Lord refused, for it was not a fit occasion for a miracle. Lazarus cannot be raised out of the grave except by a miracle, but he can be unstripped without a miracle, and therefore human hands must do it. If there is anything in the kingdom of God which we can do ourselves it is folly to say, "May the Lord do it," for he will do nothing of the sort. If you can do it you shall do it; or if you refuse the neglect shall be visited upon you.

I suppose that those bands were left *that those who came to unwind him should be sure that he was the same man who died*. Some of them may have said, "This is Lazarus, for these are the grave-clothes which we wrapped about him. There is no trickery here. This is the self-same man that was laid out and prepared by us for burial." "I recollect putting in that stitch," cries one. "I remember that stain in the linen," cries another. From coming so near to Lazarus they would be equally well assured that he was really alive! They perceived his living flesh rising as each ligature was removed: they marked his breathing, and the flush which reddened his cheek. For some such cause our Lord permits the quickened sinner to remain in a measure of bondage, that we may know that the man is the same person who was really dead in trespasses and sins. He was no sham sinner, for the traces of his sins are still upon him. You can see by what he says that his training was none of the best; the relics of the old nature show what manner of man he used to be. Every now and then the smell of the sepulchre meets your nostril; the mould of the grave has stained his grave-clothes; his was true death, and no imitation of it. So, too, we know that he is alive, for we hear his sighs and cries, and we perceive that his experience is that of a living child of God. Those desires, that searching of heart, and that longing to be soundly right with God,—we know what these mean. It is a great help to us in discerning spirits, and in being assured of the work of God upon any person, to come into living contact with those imperfections which it is to be our privilege to remove under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

Moreover, I still think that the main object was *that these disciples*

*might enter into rare fellowship with Christ.* They could each say, not proudly but still joyfully, "Our Lord raised Lazarus, and I was there and helped to unloose him from his grave-clothes." Perhaps Martha could say in after-life, "I took the napkin from my brother's dear face." and Mary could add, "I helped to unbind a hand." It is most sweet to hope that we have done anything to cheer, or to teach, or sanctify a soul. Not unto us can be any praise, but unto us there is much comfort concerning this thing. Brothers and sisters, will you not earn a share in this dear delight? Will you not seek the lost sheep? Will you not sweep the house for the lost money? Will you not at the very least help to feast the long-lost son? This, you see, *gives you such an interest in a saved person.* Those who are very observant tell us that those whom we serve may forget us, but those who do us a service are fast bound to us thereby. Many kindnesses you may do for people and they will be altogether ungrateful, but those who have bestowed the benefit do not forget. When the Lord Jesus sets us to help others it is partly that they may love us for what we have done, but still more that we may love them because we have rendered them a benefit. Is there any love like the love of a mother to her child? Is it not the strongest affection on earth? Why does a mother love her child? Did the little child ever render a pennyworth of service to the mother? Certainly not. It is the mother that does everything for the child. So then the Lord binds us to the new converts in love by permitting us to help them. Thus is the church made all of a piece and woven together from the top throughout by the workmanship of love. O you who are devoid of love it is evident that you do not labour with pure desire to benefit others, for if you did you would be filled with affection for them.

Ere we leave this point of seasonable assistance, let us ask—*why should we remove these grave-clothes?* It is enough reply that the Lord has bidden us do so. He commands us to "Loose him, and let him go." He bids us comfort the feeble-minded and support the weak. If he commands it we need no other reason. I hope, my dear friends, you will set to work at once, for the King's business requireth haste, and we are traitors if we delay.

We should do this because it is very possible that we helped to bind those grave-clothes upon our friend. Some of the people who were at Bethany that day had assisted in the burial of Lazarus, and surely those should loose Lazarus who helped to bind him. Many a Christian man before his conversion has helped to make sinners worse by his example, and possibly after his conversion he may by his indifference and want of zeal have aided in binding new converts in the bonds of doubt and sorrow. At any rate, you have said of many a person, "He will never be saved!" Thus you have wrapped him in grave-clothes; the Lord never told you to do *that*—you did it on your own accord; and now that he bids you remove those grave-clothes, will you not be quick to do it?

I remember when somebody lent a hand to take the grave-clothes off from me, and therefore I desire to loose the grave-clothes of others. If we cannot repay what we owe to the precise individual who wrought us good, we can at least repay it by working for the general benefit of seekers. "There," said a benevolent man, as he gave help to a poor

man, "take that money, and when you can pay it back give it to the next man whom you meet who is in the same plight as yourself, and tell him he is to pay it to another destitute person as soon as he can afford it; and so my money will go travelling on for many a day." That is how our Lord does: he sends a brother to loose my bonds; then I am helped to set another free, and he releases a third, and so on to the world's end. God grant that you and I may not be negligent in this heavenly service.

IV. Lastly, A PRACTICAL HINT. If the Lord Jesus Christ employed the disciples in relieving Lazarus of his grave-clothes, do you not think he would employ us if we were ready for such work? Yonder is Paul: the Lord Jesus has struck him down; but the lowly Ananias must visit him and baptize him, that he may receive his sight. There is Cornelius: he has been seeking the Lord, and the Lord is gracious to him, but he must first hear Peter. There is a wealthy Ethiopian riding in his chariot, and he is reading the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, but he cannot understand it till Philip comes. Lydia has an opened heart, but only Paul can lead her to the Lord Jesus. Innumerable are the instances of souls blessed by human instrumentality; but I shall conclude by calling attention to one passage upon which I wish to dwell for a second or two.

When the prodigal came home, the father did not say to one of his servants, "Go and meet him,"—No; we read "when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him." He did all this himself. The father personally forgave him, and restored him; but we read further on "*the father said to his servants*, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry." The loving father might have done all this himself might he not? Oh yes, but then he desired that all the servants in the house should be of one accord with him in the joyful reception of his son. The great Lord could do everything for a sinner himself, but he does not do so because he wishes all of us to be in fellowship with him. Come, fellow-servants, bring forth the best robe. I am never happier then when I preach the righteousness of Christ, and try to put it upon the sinner. "What!" cries one, "you cannot put it on!" So the parable says—"Bring forth the best robe *and put it on him.*" I not only bring it out and show it; but by the Holy Spirit's help I try to put it on the sinner. I hold it up before him, just as you hold up a friend's great-coat to help him to put it on. You have to guide the poor sinner's hand into the sleeve, and lift it up upon his shoulders or he might never get it on. You are to teach him, comfort him, cheer him, and, in fact, help him to be dressed like one of the family. Then the ring, can we not bring it forth? Surely the father should have put the ring upon his son's hand. No, he bids his servants do that. He cries to them, "Put a ring on his hand"; introduce him into fellowship, gladden him with the communion of saints. You and I must conduct the new convert into the joys of Christian society, and let him know what it is to be married unto Christ, and joined unto his people. We must put honour upon these reclaimed ones, and decorate those who once were degraded. Nor must we fail to put shoes on his feet! He

has a long journey to go; he is to be a pilgrim, and we must help to shoe him with the preparation of the gospel of peace. His feet are new in the Lord's ways: we must show him how to run on the Master's errands. As for the fatted calf, it is ours to feed the restored ones; and as for the music and the dancing, it is ours to make the hearts of penitents glad by rejoicing over them. There is plenty to be done: O my brethren, try and do some of it this morning. Certain among us will be looking after an enquirer as soon as the service is over, and they will try to put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. I wish that more of you did this; but if you cannot do so within these Tabernacle walls, do it when you get home. Commence a holy ministry for the converted who are not yet brought into liberty. There are children of God who have not yet a shoe to their feet; there are plenty of shoes in the house, but no servant has put them on. When I come to look, I see some brethren who have not the ring on their hand. Oh, that I might have the privilege of putting it on! I charge you, brethren, by the blood that bought you, and by the love that holds you, and by the supreme bounty which supplies your need, go forth and do what your Master graciously permits and commands you to do; loose Lazarus, bring forth the best robe and put it on him, put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and let us all eat and be merry with our Father. Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xi. 1—46.

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HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—176, 251, 35 (Ver I.)

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