

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE CHIEF PHYSICIAN AND THE CENTURION'S
SERVANT.

A Sermon

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“Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.”—Matthew viii. 7.

“And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.”—Matthew viii. 13.

THE centurion of Capernaum is an example to us in a matter which bears upon the collection appointed for to-day, which, you know, is for the hospitals. This good soldier cared for the sick, and was anxious for the recovery of his palsied servant. Every employer should take a sympathetic interest in his domestics when they are ill, but in some cases this is not thought of. “If they cannot do their work, they must go”; this is too often the language used about them, and they are got out of the house as soon as possible. I do not say that masters and mistresses are often cruel, but I fear that some of them are none too kind. Among religious persons kindness towards man should be as manifest as piety towards God. The centurion had done what he could to benefit religiously the people among whom he dwelt, for the elders of the Jews said, “He loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.” But he combined with a desire to benefit the soul a sincere desire for the welfare of the body; and this was apparent in the interest which he took in his “boy,” his personal servant, or young valet. God has joined body and soul together, and they ought not to be sundered in our deeds of charity.

This captain's sympathy with his suffering valet was shown by practical action. He did not say that he felt for him, and then go off to the guard-room and keep clear of the sick youth; nor did he merely stand and watch him in his pain, to see how he would fare, but he aroused himself, he went abroad, he called together the elders of the city, he summoned his choice friends to him: in fact, he made the whole circle of his acquaintance feel a sympathy with him concerning the illness of his body-servant. Then he sent these elders and friends to the best physician of the age, and as I think also followed at their heels himself: he used the

surest means within his reach, and appealed to him to whom none ever appealed in vain. From the centurion I gather that we must not be content with loving our people and building them synagogues, but we must also build them hospitals and dispensaries. Find them preachers by all means, but find them surgeons too. We may not forget the soul, but we must also remember that the soul dwells in a body liable to many disorders. We may become just a little too spiritual, so spiritual as to spirit away the very spirit of Christianity. God grant us grace to be as tenderly considerate of suffering humanity as this centurion was, and we probably shall be so if we have as strong faith and as deep humility as he had.

Our Lord himself also in our text sets us an example, which may plead with us on behalf of hospitals to-day; for he was here upon the high errand of our redemption, yet did he not consider it at all derogatory to his divine purpose to be continually engaged in healing disease. For three years he walked the hospitals: he lived all day long in an infirmary; for all around him at one time they laid the sick in the streets, and at all times physical evil in some form or other came in his way. He put forth his hand, or spake the word, and healed all sorts of maladies. This our Lord did very readily, for it was part of his life-work. "I will come and heal him," said he, for he was a physician in constant practice, and would be round at once to see the patient. "He went about doing good," and in all this he would let his people know that he intended not to bless one part of man alone, but the whole of our nature, taking upon himself not only our sins, but our sicknesses. Jesus means to bless the body as well as the soul; and though for this present he hath left our body very much under the power of sickness, for still "the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness;" yet he foreshadows in his healing miracles the resurrection, when he shall raise us perfectly healed, and the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick." Every restored limb, and opened eye, and healed wound is a token that Jesus cares for our flesh and blood, and means that the body shall share the benefits of his death by a glorious resurrection.

As in our Lord's life his teaching was always connected with healing, he would have the church also take a very deep interest in the bodily sorrows of the people as well as in their spiritual needs. It will be a very great pity if ever it should be thought that benevolence is divorced from Christianity, for hitherto the crown of the faith of Jesus has been love to men; it is, indeed, the glory of Christianity that wherever it comes it erects buildings altogether unknown to heathenism—hospitals, asylums, and other abodes of charity. The genius of Christianity is pity for the sinful and the suffering. Let the church be a healer like her Lord: at least if she cannot pour fourth virtue from the hem of her garment, nor "say in a word" so that sickness may fly, let her be among the most prompt to help in everything that can assuage pain or assist poverty. So ought it to be, for "as Jesus was, so are we also in this world." Did he not tell us, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." We cannot too diligently study his character, for he has left us an example that we may follow in his steps. Since we cannot practise the healing art, let us give support to those

whose whole time is spent in it that they may be able without fee or reward to watch over the sick poor; and let none among us act the churl when the blind, the halt, and the lame cry to us as they did to our Master of old.

This said, I desire to pass on to my subject, which is of a spiritual kind. I want you to mark the development of the faith of the centurion, and side by side with it the growing manifestation of our Lord's power. Both are seen in the narrative.

The centurion had evidently heard about Christ; perhaps the healing of the ruler's child had satisfied him that Jesus is the Messiah. He had attended at the synagogue. I cannot doubt that a man who had built a synagogue would be sure to go to it; and there he had learned of the Coming One, foretold by prophets and expected by saints. This Anointed One was to work wonders among mankind, and especially wonders of healing. Thus he had gathered that Jesus was the Christ, and he believed in him as having power to heal his sick servant.

The first practical result was that he humbly sent the elders with the urgent request to "come and heal him." He believed that Jesus, if he were present, could restore the dying youth. He had thought it over, and his faith had reached as far as that of Mary and Martha when they said: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." In effect he said, If thou wilt come here, great Master, my servant will not die. He therefore cried, "Come and heal him;" Observe that our Lord's answer was exactly proportioned to the measure of faith in the prayer: "I will come and heal him:" "Thou sayest, come and heal him; I reply, I will come and heal him." So far so good: but the captain's faith is to be seen in a still clearer light. He has been considering the matter still further, and his humility leads him to feel that he ought not to expect Jesus to come to his house. Why should he trouble the Master to leave the crowd and to cease preaching, to come and attend to his servant? He is grieved to think that he should have proposed a visit: he feels himself unfit to entertain one so holy and so great, and therefore he sends off his friends post haste to offer humble apologies, and to beg the Master not to come. He has at the same time advanced in his belief in Christ's power, for he says in effect, "There is no need that thou shouldst come: only will it, merely say the word and the healing is wrought. For I also am a man under authority, deriving authority from being under it, and I have only to say to one soldier go, and to another, come, and my will is done. I have no need to execute my own wishes personally, for my will governs my troop and each man is eager to do my bidding. So, great Master, stay where thou art, go on with thy other work, and only will to bless me and it will be enough; thy desire will be accomplished without fail. Oh thou great Emperor of all the forces of the universe, bid thy triumphant eagles fly this way, and the foe will vanish before thee." Here was growing faith, and side by side with it was a clearer manifestation of the Master's power. Our Lord Jesus there and then wills that healing power should go forth; he moves no further towards the house where the palsied patient lies, but rather he turns round, and in obedience to the wish of the centurion he walks away; yet the miracle is wrought, the paralytic child has risen from the bed, the captain's heart

is gladdened, and those who came to plead stand in the house to praise the Lord. Awe-struck by the finger of God so near and so manifest, what could they do but bless the Lord, who had visited his people?

That is the story, and it proves that our Lord Jesus Christ is omnipotent in the physical world. He can do what he wills, and though at this present time we do not appeal to him for miraculous cures, it were well if we trusted him more upon that point; for all of power which dwells in medicine, and all of skill which is found in physicians, is only effective through his tender mercy. We know, however, that our Lord is omnipotent in the moral and spiritual world: and there to-day he displays his sublimest feats of power and wisdom. We are going to think about this, and may the Holy Spirit make the meditation useful to us.

I. The first thing I invite you to consider is THE PERFECT READINESS OF OUR LORD JESUS for works of mercy. The centurion was concerned about his servant, just as you and I are, I hope, to-day concerned about certain poor souls which lie paralysed by sin. We mourn over them, and if we could heal them we would gladly suffer any self-denial or suffering. If we could bring our neighbours to Christ, it would be the utmost joy to us; their perishing souls are to some of us as a burdensome stone, a load heavy to bear. How can we endure to see them die? The mass of working men around us, ay, and the majority of our wealthy neighbours are under the power of the wicked one. To them the things which are seen are the only objects of their thoughts. They will not regard the gospel of Christ, or eternity, or judgment, or heaven, or hell. The privileges with which our country is so largely endowed are treated as if they were of no value whatever: Sabbaths, Bibles, the gospel, and the throne of grace are despised. This is mournful indeed! Brethren, we must go to Jesus about this evil thing, and it may help us to do this if we now think of his great willingness to bless servant or child, or any other person whom we may bring before him in prayer.

That willingness we shall see first if we notice that *he did not cavil at the pleas which the Jewish elders urged* on behalf of the centurion, though they must have been very distasteful to his mind. They said, "He is worthy for whom thou shouldst do this": that was not the right style of pleading with him who came to save the lost and bless the undeserving in the freeness of his grace. The elders said, "He loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue," and so on. Poor souls, they were doing their best, and using the kind of argument by which their own hopes were sustained. Our Lord regarded the spirit of their intercession rather than the form in which they offered it; and though the plea, laying so much stress upon human merit, might very well have warranted him in saying, "Hold your peace, for you are damaging rather than helping the case," yet our Lord was so willing that he raised no question. From afar he read the heart of the centurion and he knew that the good man's advocates were altogether misrepresenting his views and feelings. The last thing in the world that the lowly-minded soldier would have pleaded would have been personal worthiness. His own words were, "I am not worthy." Had he known that his advocates would have talked in that fashion he would never have allowed them to speak on his behalf. If the centurion could have been there he would have said, "Your words cut me to the quick, for I am not worthy."

What little I have been able to do I cannot boast of. I have done no more than I ought to have done. Do not speak to my Lord in such a style." But Jesus was so willing to go that he put up with all the blunders of the elders, and responded to their request, "I will come and heal him." Beloved, very likely you and I make quite as great mistakes when we pray: we fancy we pray very correctly, but I wonder what our Lord thinks of our prayers. Surely he has often to pick out the meaning of our hearts from among the errors of our lips; but so willing is he to bless us, that if there be first a willing mind it shall still be accepted, for he rejoiceth to hear every prayer which seeks healing for sin-sick souls.

His willingness is seen, next, in the fact of his so cheerfully *granting the first prayer in the form in which it was put*. They besought him that he would "come and heal" his servant. Now, that was not exactly the best form in which to put it, certainly it was not that which commended itself to the maturer thoughts of the centurion. Why should Jesus go? He could heal the patient without moving from the spot. Was there not a considerable measure of unbelief about the elders' prayer? Yet our blessed Master took the prayer just as it was, and he seemed to say,—"I see the measure of your faith, and I will give you the blessing as you are able to receive it." The Lord is very generous to come down to our capacities; if he were always to act according to his own divine standard we should be greatly dazzled, but we should be afraid to draw near to him. He condescendingly lays aside the splendour of his majesty to act as well as to speak to us after the manner of men, and then we see the sweet voluntariness of his grace, and the cheerful willingness of his spirit to do us good. If we cannot receive a blessing in any other than a second-class way, we shall have it in the way in which we can take it; as our faith can get no further, he will do the wonder according to the manner in which our scanty thought is able to conceive and ask and receive. Oh what a willing friend we have in Christ. He bows the heavens and comes down, meeting the weak in his weakness and the fainting in his faintness; answering prayers, not only according to the riches of *his* glory, but according to the poverty of *our* infirmity.

Notice further, that when the centurion sent a fresh deputation of his choice friends to say to the Master, "Trouble not thyself, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof," *our Lord did not quarrel with the change of the prayer*. Some people would have said, "What is it that you want? First, I am to come, and when I am almost there I am met with a request not to come,—what do you mean? This is not respectful, and I will not come." Our gentle Jesus spoke not so. Oh, no; such talk might come from you, and from me, who are so great in our own esteem, but never from him, because he is so much greater than we are. He thought not of himself, nor his own dignity. Let us imitate his meek and quiet spirit. When you are trying to do good you will often be put about by the whims of those whom you would benefit. You will find that when you do what people ask you they are not satisfied: many adults are like sick children, who are always cross and fretful. We must humour these poor hearts, as our Lord did. He was so willing to bless that he seemed to give *carte blanche* to those

who asked of him : " Yes, you shall have the blessing which way you like, so that you are but able to receive it. It shall be given to you according to your faith." Our Lord shifted his movements without pressure and would go to the house or not, just as the centurion's faith might lead him to pray. Blessed, for ever blessed, be our most gracious Saviour who never wearies of us, nor takes offence at our childish changes.

The Saviour's willingness to bless this centurion's servant was very manifest from the fact that *he did not impute an ill motive to the centurion* when he bade him refrain from visiting the house. There was no mistrust about our Lord. He knew too much both of man's evil and of the sincerity of those in whom his grace was placed to suspect and to interpret harshly. Ignorance and selfishness are mistrustful, but love thinketh no evil. If there are two ways of understanding a sentence, my brothers, and one is better than the other, always read it in the kindest way, if you can. Never put hard constructions upon words and actions. You and I might have said in the case before us, " You see he does not want me in his fine house. He is a centurion and thinks much of himself, and I am wearing a poor garment, and therefore he does not want me in his villa to disgrace his halls. He is a captain, a man in authority, having soldiers under him, his pride forbids my approach, and therefore I will have nothing to do with him." But no, it was not in the Master's heart to think thus bitterly, but as at the first he had said, " I will come and heal him," so now when genuine humility requests him not to come, he turns about, but works the miracle all the same. Brothers and sisters, our condescending Saviour must be very willing to bless men, since he takes the true meaning of their prayers where others would write a harsh interpretation. Be not afraid to approach him however unworthy you are, for he will put the best construction upon your broken petitions, and interpret them always to your gain. His disciples may severely criticize one another and may criticize *you*, but they have learned no hard words in his company.

Nor did he demur at all to the comparison which the centurion made. " I also," said the centurion, " am a man under authority." If you were to read that expression with dark spectacles, you might make a great deal of mischief out of it. A caviller might say, " How dares he even for a moment compare himself to the Son of God? How can he draw a parallel of which he is one side and the blessed Lord the other? What impertinence!" Brethren, our Lord was no critic. No, among the brotherhood of fault-finders you never see the Christ of God. When he has to deal with sincere people, he picks no holes, imputes no motives, and dwells on no mistakes. The centurion did not wish to make his metaphor go on all fours, and our Lord did not treat him as if he did. Many a time have some of us had to suffer from this mode of attack, but never from our Master, nor from those who imitate him. He took the meaning of the centurion's illustration, and he admired it; for indeed it was a grand and beautiful idea, to set forth our Lord Jesus as the great Emperor of the universe to whom all things are under rule, and to whose faintest word each form of force, whether good or evil, is sure to render obedience. He showed that he had rightly estimated Christ, and enthroned

him as he should be enthroned in the place of unlimited sovereignty and power. The Master did not, therefore, for a moment demur to anything he said. No, but the prayer had been offered that the servant might be healed, and the prayer was granted: the faith had been exercised which believed that Christ could heal, and that faith was honoured. Our Lord did exactly as the prayer requested him. He came when he was asked to come; he stayed when he was asked to stay. He spoke the word when he was requested to speak the word; he healed when he was asked to heal. In all things he yielded himself entirely to the centurion's wish, to show his cheerful alacrity in benefiting the suffering boy and in answering the master's prayer. Come, then, dear friends, we may be quite sure of our Lord's sympathy, though we are not praying about a sick boy, but pleading for our sinful neighbours. He loves sinners better than we do, for they have cost him more than they have ever cost us, even if we have spent nights in watching and prayer on their behalf. To him it is committed of the Father to save the lost, and his zeal to accomplish the work never flags; and therefore we may be sure that our pleadings and efforts will touch a kindred chord in his heart.

II. Secondly, an equally interesting topic is before us in THE CONSCIOUS ABILITY OF OUR LORD. You have seen his perfect willingness, now behold his boundless power. I do not know how it affects your minds, but that sentence from the lip of Jesus, "I will come and heal him," has a strange majesty about it to my soul. It is the word of a king wherein there is power. Perhaps the most majestic word that was ever uttered was "Light be:" no sooner was it heard than the eternal darkness fled, and light was: but surely this is scarcely second in grandeur, if second at all; its sound is as much the voice of the Lord as that which scattered the primeval shades: "I will come and heal him." Yet this royal and powerful word was spoken as a matter of course; our Lord Jesus did not deliberate, but the healing word flowed from him as naturally as the perfume from the flowers. "I will come and heal him,"—it is an utterance resolute, true, clear, comprehensible, unconditional, and *to him* natural, and common-place, though to us divine.

It shows, dear friends, our Lord's conscious ability to deal with all manner of evil, since *he was not at all puzzled by this intricate case*. Almost any other physician would have felt some measure of perplexity. The case is described as that of a man sick of the palsy and yet "grievously tormented." How could that be? Paralysis can hardly be connected with acute pain. It brings numbness and so ends sensation, at least such is my impression. Some interpreters think the disease must have been a form of tetanus, but there is no mention of tetanus in either account. It was a palsy, and yet he was "grievously tormented." I know nothing about it, but I have read that there is a period in which paralysis may turn into apoplexy, and the patient may suffer extreme agony. If so, this may explain the mystery. However, though the case perplexed many, it did not perplex the Lord Jesus, for he said, "I will come and heal him." Now, my brother ministers, have not you and I a great many cases coming in our way which tax our experience and make us feel at a loss? I have had during this week to deal with several tempted ones whose difficulties have put me to a non plus, or

would have done so if I had not borrowed from my Lord. Some experiences are a tangled skein, we cannot follow the thread, and so far as we do follow it knots and snarls are our chief reward. See how Jesus sweeps away all debates with "I will come and heal him." All the complicated phenomena of human disease he comprehends, and along the dark labyrinth of human experience his mighty word makes a way for itself: undisturbed, and even undelayed, the eternal energy enters the soul, for Jesus says, "I will come and heal him."

Neither did the extremity of the case at all dishearten him, for this poor man was ready to die, so Luke tells us, just on the verge of expiring, yet Jesus says, "I will come and heal him." It does not matter to Jesus what the stage of the disease may be. A common physician would shake his head and say, "Ah, you should have sent for me before. I might have done something at an earlier date, but the sufferer is now beyond all human help." Poor souls are never beyond the reach of the divine healer, and so he says without a word of doubt, "I will come and heal him." Ay, had he been dead, Jesus could have said and could have done the same. "I will come and heal him" is a word for all emergencies. Beloved, let us never hesitate to hope in prayer because the persons for whom we plead are such great and horrible sinners, and so very far gone in crime. So long as they are not actually in hell let us firmly believe that Christ can save them; and, verily, if we can believe in our great Saviour with mighty faith, we shall yet hear him say of many a reprobate and outcast, "I will come and heal him."

I again remark that *our Lord speaks of this healing as quite a matter of course*, for his language is after the manner of speech which men use when they know that they are *au fait* at their work, and can do it as soon as they have it before them. A person asks a workman to repair a lock or a window, and he answers, "Yes, I will come and attend to it." He means that he can do it, it is quite in his line, and it is as easy to him to do it as to come. So can our blessed Master save a sinner as easily as his Spirit can come to that sinner, and we all know that his Spirit is a free Spirit, and like the wind, bloweth where he listeth. Jesus could come to the centurion's house, and he could as easily heal as he could come. "I will come and heal him:" the work is simple enough to the divine Redeemer, to whom nothing is impossible. No disease of sin can baffle the Saviour or even cost him special effort to eject it. Look to him, ye ends of the earth, and prove for yourselves that none are beyond his mercy's reach. Oh that all who hear me this day would make a like trial of his healing might.

As for the method of procedure, our Lord in his conscious power *treats the modus operandi as a matter of indifference*. He grants the first petition as it was presented to him, and will come and heal him; but when he is requested not to come he quite as willingly says, "According to thy faith so be it unto thee." He could heal as well at a distance as near at hand. Present or absent, it was all the same to him. A touch, a word, a thought could do all that was wanted. It was so, and it is so still, for our blessed Lord saves sinners in all sorts of ways. He can save them in their pews, under the preaching which they have heard so constantly, or he can meet with them in their lonely chambers, reading some godly book; or he can wound their hearts by a loving

word spoken during a walk with a friend. We have known him call men by his grace right out of the paths of sin, wounding them with secret arrows when they were at ease and secure in the service of the devil: where no means of grace as we call them were present, yet have sinners been smitten at heart and have been turned to God by that heavenly influence of the Spirit, which remains the supreme miracle of the present dispensation. Saul of Tarsus was not on his knees in prayer, but hastening to shed innocent blood, and yet the Lord brought him down and made him seek salvation. Beloved, our Lord knows how to reach inaccessible persons; they may shut *us* out, but they cannot shut *him* out. This should much encourage us in pleading for souls which are out of our usual line of action. When we plead with Jesus, let us never bind him down to ways and means of our own choosing, but let us leave to him the method of salvation.

Jesus was so conscious of his power that *you never find him uttering an expression of wonder, or manifesting the slightest surprise when his will is done, and a notable miracle is wrought.* No, but he did wonder at the centurion's faith, and on another occasion he marvelled at the people's unbelief. It is no wonder to Christ that he saves sinners, he is so in the habit of doing it, and he is so able to do it. You and I will wonder, and throughout eternity we will declare that wonder, singing with rapture and surprise the lovingkindness and pardoning power of Christ Jesus; but *he* does not wonder. Virtue goes out of him almost unconsciously, for he is so full of power that he can bless on all sides and scarcely know it. Even as the sun shines north, south, east, and west, and never wonders at its own shining; or as a fountain sendeth forth its sparkling drops, and never stops to admire itself, or to marvel at its own flashing flow, so doth Jesus readily, easily, out of his very nature scatter pardon and salvation on all sides. He marvels at our faith, he marvels oftener at our unbelief, but to him his own power is not a thing of wonder at all. Beloved, I want you to get fast hold of this thought if you can, and I beg you to hide it away in your hearts,—that Jesus Christ is beyond measure able to save. We do not half believe it; we think we do, but we do not even a tithe believe it, for when we meet with a rather hard case we are ready to give it up in despair. Despairing persons we too soon leave in their gloom; and even melancholy men and women we are shy of; we wish we had never seen them, instead of believing up to their point, and believably interceding until we see them happy in Christ. If we meet with a horrible blasphemer, or a foul liver, or a bloated drinker, we feel quite out of our latitude and in the land of monsters, whereas it is with such cases that our Lord is much at home, and we ought to pray most about such persons, and to be most confident that the gospel was meant to meet their grievous ills. Is there not a great Saviour for great sinners?

III. We shall close by a third equally interesting point, of great practical value. I have spoken of our Lord's willingness and power; now we will note THE ABIDING METHOD OF OUR LORD JESUS.

The first method mentioned here was "Come and heal him." Jesus then went about doing good, but he does not now vouchsafe his bodily presence, or give physical tokens of his being near to anyone. If any say to us, "Lo here," or "Lo there," let us not believe them, for Jesus is

not now upon the earth ; He hath gone up on high. We do not now pray, "Come and heal him," in the sense of expecting a vision or revelation of Christ after the flesh to those whom we love. We hope that he will come one day a second time, and heal the sicknesses of this poor world, but till then we know him not after the flesh, neither do we seek any personal coming. The other and permanent mode of our Lord's action was that he should speak the word, and so perform the cure. "Say in a word and my servant shall be healed." That is the style of our Lord to-day and throughout the whole of this dispensation. The healing energy of Jesus is now seen not by his personal presence, but by the power of his word in answer to the prayer of faith. This is henceforth his fixed and abiding method of cure : the word rendered effectual by believing prayer. Now, I want you to notice that this mode of operation is outwardly similar to the Lord's usual and natural way of exercising his power in nature and in providence. Though clearly it is one of the highest forms of supernatural action, it may not at first seem to be so. Look at this:—when Jesus stands at a bedside, bows over the sick child, and touches his little hand, and he is healed, the deed is notable, and is a great miracle ; but will it not seem to you to be even a greater display of power, if possible, that Jesus should remain at a distance, and not see the suffering one, nor even speak so as to be heard in the darkened chamber, and yet his mere will shall be able to quicken life and restore health ? It is a very clear display of supernatural power is it not ? This healing by volition, or by a single word ? Yet it does not seem so striking, somehow, to half-opened eyes when you look at it from the grosser point of view ; for this is just how the good God is working every day in nature and in providence, achieving his purposes by his silent will, and by those echoes of his creating voice, which linger among us still. When but a little while ago your fields were bare, and your gardens desolate, if the Lord had suddenly come forth in awful glory, and caused snow and ice to fly before him, and had then benignly touched the valleys and the hills, and covered them with grass and corn, you would have exclaimed, "This is a great miracle" : but in truth it is an equally great display of power that the deed is done, though by less glaring processes. The will of the Lord transforms the clods of the valley into an army of wheat ears and clover balls ; his quiet wish reddens the clusters of the vineyard and ripens the fruit of the garden ; is not this also a marvel of power ? What though the Lord has not come forth riding upon cherub wings, nor has he spoken audibly in commanding sentences, yet the secret energy of the eternal word is evermore going forth to give us seedtime and harvest, cold and heat. What diviner form of miracle is to be desired ? I believe that when we rise to the possession of a fully developed faith, we shall see ourselves to be daily compassed about with the omnipotence of God, and shall look on every tiny blade of grass, and upon the insect which balances itself thereon, and the dewdrop that decorates it, as being quite as manifestly the finger of God as when Nilus turns to blood, or the dust of Egypt becomes flies. To the believer miracles have not ceased, but the common course of nature teems with them.

The power of the word in answer to the prayer of faith is now our

Lord's way of blessing, and this method exactly suits the wish of true *humility*. Humility says, "I am not worthy that God should do anything for me which would attract attention to me or make me seem honoured above others." The lowly soul hears of one who was saved through a dream or a vision, and he feels that he is not worthy to be thus favoured. No, my friend, and you need not wish for it, the word of the Lord is enough, and that word is nigh you at this moment, in your mouth and in your heart, you have but to hear and your soul shall live. If I were pleading for the conversion of a sinner I should feel hampered by my own unworthiness if I believed that salvation necessitated a bodily manifestation of my Lord or some extraordinary display of power before men's eyes; but if my Lord will save by his word only, then do I venture to ask with confidence. Here is no parade of power, but quiet divine energy, and this the meek of the earth delight in.

I am sure that it pleases *faith* better than any other way. Oh that the power of the word might be displayed at this time. Oh my Lord, how I desire of thee that thou wouldst save thousands, and I would be glad if it were done without me, without any of thy servants, if thou wouldst only say in a word and by thy Holy Spirit cause a nation to be born in a day! Certain professors eagerly pine for a great stir: they will not believe that the kingdom of God prospers unless thousands crowd into our assemblies; and unless great excitement reigns, and all the papers are ringing with the names of famous preachers. They like it all the better if they hear of persons being thrown into fits during the meetings, or read of men and women falling down, or screaming under excitement, and I know not what besides. They can believe in Christ's power if there are signs and wonders, but not else. That is going back to "come and heal him." But we are content to abide by the second mode. Can you not believe that by each one of us making the gospel of God to have free course, our Lord can effectually save men by his word? Quietly, without observation, without sign or wonder, Jesus will bless believing testimonies and answer believing prayers. Strong faith is well content with the Lord's settled and usual mode of action, and rejoices to see him save men by his word in answer to the prayer of faith.

It is perfectly reasonable that we should expect our Lord to display his healing power in this way. What the centurion said was full of forcible argument. He said, "I am a captain of a troop. I do not have to go about from place to place to do everything personally. No, I remain in my quarters and issue orders, and I am sure of their being carried out. I say to this one 'go,' and he goeth, and to my servant 'do this,' and he doeth it." Is it not clear that the far greater Captain of our salvation does not need to come forth bodily in order to save any; his word will suffice. Give thine order, O Immanuel. Speak to the powers of darkness, and the captive sinner shall be free. Speak, and the human will must yield to thee, and the human heart must receive thee. Is it not so? My brethren, we do not believe enough in our Lord. I come back to that; we do not believe enough in what is so perfectly reasonable. If we will but speak our Master's word, and let it go forth, and bear sway, with less and less of our own word to cripple and hinder it, souls must be saved. Do you not believe in the plain preaching

of the glad tidings? Do you not believe in the rams' horns? O children of Israel, do you despise the rams' horns, and do you long for horses and chariots and battering rams and mighty engines of war? Remember Jericho, and how by God's own appointed though simple means the huge walls rocked to their fall. Will not the Lord's own means suffice you still? Oh, believers, do you want anything this day except the simple preaching of the gospel? If so, you are departing from the point wherein your faith ought to remain, since still it pleaseth God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. "The world by wisdom knew not God," and never will know God. Trust not philosophy, but stand by the old old story, and pray the Master to work by it as in former ages. You want no new word to be spoken, only let the living word be filled with power, and souls will be healed.

Now, if any one here will try in his own case this divine method of healing, it will succeed in his instance as in that of the centurion's servant. If you, dear hearer, will believe the power of Christ and trust him to save you, you shall certainly obtain eternal life, and that at once. Can you heartily believe in Jesus as you find him revealed in Scripture? Can you be content without strange feelings, without remarkable terrors, without dreams or visions? Can you be content simply to trust your Saviour? You shall be healed immediately, ay, this very moment, ere this shower has ceased the showers of everlasting grace shall have fallen upon you. You must not ask the Lord to come by some singular feeling within you, but just to speak while you are hearing, and the miracle of grace will be wrought.

Let me add once more: if you who are converted long to see others saved you will be wise to keep to the established method. Pray, believe, and then expect the Lord to work by his own word in answer to your prayer. The centurion rose to this method; he began lower by desiring a personal visit, but he grew up to this plain, simple, yet glorious way. Can you not do the same? Seek no marvels, but test the power of the gospel upon your friend. Do not ask the Lord to go out of his way, but beseech him to apply his word with power to those whose eternal welfare lies near your heart. Bring your loved ones under the sound of the gospel and entreat the healing Lord to put forth his power thereby, and your desire shall be accomplished. Alas, if the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? If he were to come now, and ask us all to put into the collecting box what faith we have, when he opened it, would it come to the eighth part of a farthing? Yet every man among us that is a believer ought to have an inexhaustible treasure of golden faith. Lord, we believe; help thou our unbelief! Lord, increase our faith. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matt. viii. 5—13;
Luke vii. 1—10.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—257, 422, 331.