

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE MINISTRY OF GRATITUDE.

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## A Sermon

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“And immediately she arose and ministered unto them.”—Luke iv. 39.

PETER's wife's mother had been sick of a great fever, and had been restored by the touch of the Saviour's hands, and by the power of the Saviour's word. The grace of God does not secure us from trial. The house of Peter and of Andrew, (for it was common to them both,) was a highly favoured one; the grace of God had passed by many other houses, but had selected this for its dwelling-place; and yet in that abode there was great sickness,—the wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and was near to die. This was no small grief to the household, but that grief was for their lasting benefit. God loves his chosen too well to let them always live without the rod. If he loved us less he might allow us unalloyed pleasure, but the love of our wise Father is too great to deprive us of the sacred benefits of affliction. Sickness came to that house not as an enemy, but as a friend; for it was the means whereby Christ's great power was made manifest to that family, and through his power his love. The wife's mother could never have been so distinguished a subject of the Redeemer's power if she had not been prostrated with fever. The malaria from the marshes around the city occasioned her being made a trophy of our Lord's divine energy; the worst of ills are often the black horses upon which the very best of blessings ride to us. It was no small honour to Peter that his house became the head-quarters of the Saviour. The sick thronged the door; as the sun went down, and the Sabbath was over, the multitude brought persons afflicted with all manner of diseases and panted to reach that favoured dwelling to lay them before the Lord. The healing power which had displayed itself within, poured forth from the house like a mighty flood, and all who drank of it were restored; that house contained the spring-head, and was beyond measure honoured thereby. Surely for many a year that house would be one of the most notable in the city:—surely it would be called the House of the Great Physician.

Not like that ancient house in Antwerp detestable because it was the den of the Inquisition, but dear to many of the healed ones and their sons, as the Hospital of Mercy, the Palace of Blessing.

Peter among the Apostles is singularly honoured, for everything about him was in some way or other connected with a miracle. His person—it was by a miracle that he had walked the waters ; it was by a miracle that he had been saved from drowning when the Saviour stretched out his hand and bade him stand fast upon the liquid wave. There was a miracle in connection with his boat, for it was from that boat that the miraculous draught of fishes had been taken, and it was filled so full that it began to sink, and Simon knelt down and adored the Saviour. There was a miracle in connection with Peter's rusty sword ; he cut off with it the ear of the high priest's servant, but the Master healed the wound that his rash defender made. And here, in this case, there was a miracle performed upon his relative,—his wife's mother was restored from a great fever by the almighty power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every Christian man should be ambitious to have the hand of God connected with everything that he has, so that when he looks upon his house he may see God's providence in giving it to him ; when he looks upon the garments that he wears he may see them to be the livery of love, and may view the food upon his table as the daily gift of divine charity. In looking back upon his whole biography, the believer may see bright spots where the presence of God flames forth and makes the humblest circumstances to be illustrious : but, above all, it ought to be his prayer that God's hand should be very conspicuous in connection with his relatives, that of every one of them it might be said, "The Lord restored her," or, "The Lord gave him spiritual life in answer to my prayer." May husband, wife, children, servants, all receive healing from "the beloved Physician" ; may our whole household be, "holiness unto the Lord," and may all sing for joy, because the Lord has done great things for them whereof we are glad.

The occurrence about which we are to speak this morning happened on a Sabbath day. Sabbaths were generally Christ's great chosen field days to break down the superstitiously rigid observance of the Sabbath amongst the Pharisees, and because it seemed as a holy day to be peculiarly adapted for the display of the greatest works of the holy Saviour. It was a Sabbath day, and the poor patient was probably lying there complaining in her soul that she could not go to the synagogue, or mingle with the people where prayer was wont to be made. Perhaps her fever had reduced her to such a state that she was quite unable to remember Christ the healer, and unable to breathe a prayer to him. But Peter and Andrew went to him, and told the case, and besought him to come and heal her. It is a blessing for thee, my friend, even though thou be sick in soul, to have saints for thy relatives—to have some in the household who will remember thee in prayer, and speak into the ear of Christ on thy behalf ; if through despair or depression of spirit thou canst not pray for thyself, happy art thou that there are compassionate friends who will speak unto the King on thy behalf. One Christian in a family may bring a great blessing to it ; but here were two, for Simon and his brother Andrew were both here ; and if two of you are agreed as touching any one thing concerning the

Master's kingdom, it shall be done unto you. The two prevailed with the Saviour, and, on that Sabbath day, when the patient little dreamed it, the Saviour came to her lowly room, and, standing over her in infinite pity, he first spoke a royal word of rebuke to the disease, and then, lifting her up gently in his own kind familiar manner she found herself perfectly restored to health. What love she must have felt to her gracious benefactor! Little wonder is it that thankfulness glowed in her heart, and being healed, she rose at once and began to serve her healer. Her ministering commenced from the very hour of her recovery. Of that ministering we are about to speak. "Immediately she arose and ministered unto them."

I. Now, the fact that this restored woman began at once to minister to Christ and to his disciples proves, first, THE CERTAINTY OF HER CURE; and there are no better ways of proving the thoroughness of our conversion than by conduct similar to hers. Suppose now, in order to prove that this woman was really restored, we were critically to examine the *modus operandi* of Christ, the way in which he usually worked, and show that on this occasion he operated in the regular orthodox fashion; suppose the Master had been accustomed, as he was not, to use one set of ceremonies over everybody whom he healed, and we were to say, "Well, he has done this, that, and the other, as he is accustomed to do; therefore, the woman is healed." it would not be at all conclusive reasoning; yet this is the reasoning of a great many. This child was baptised, this young person was confirmed, and afterwards took the sacrament, and consequently this individual is regenerated in baptism, and established in grace, and so on. The ceremonials are correct, and therefore the work is done. Some may believe such reasoning; I marvel that they should; but to us it seems that there is a far better way of testing whether persons have grace or not; and, moreover, if these aforesaid baptismally-regenerated people and sacramentally-confirmed people live in sin like other people, it appears to us that they have none of the grace of God in them, let them pretend to have received it however they may. If the woman had still been hot with fever and had all the symptoms of her disease continued in her, it would have availed nothing to have said, "This has been done and the other;" the woman would not have been healed; and if men live like unregenerate sinners, depend upon it the work of the Holy Spirit is not in them.

Suppose the patient had lain there and had begun to talk about how she felt, how much better she was, what a strange sensation passed through her when the Saviour rebuked the disease, and how strangely well she felt; yet if she had not risen up, but had lain there still, there would have been no evidence of her restoration, at any rate none that you or I could judge of. So when persons tell us that they have felt great changes of heart, that they know they are renewed because they enjoy this and love that, and hate the other, we are very hopeful, and desire to believe what they say; but, after all, trees are known by their fruits, and converted people, while they will themselves know their inward experience, cannot convince us by it; we must see their outward ministerings for Christ. If their actions be holy, if their lives be purified, then shall we know, but not till then, that their nature is renewed.



Suppose this good woman, still lying upon her bed, had begun to say, "Well, I hope I am healed," and had begun to express some feeble expectation that one day she would be able to exercise the functions of health, we could not have known that she was restored. Something more was wanted than mere hopes and expectations. Or suppose she had leaped out of her bed in wild excitement, rushed down the street, and performed strange antics, it would have been no proof that she was recovered, but it would have made us feel sure that she was in a delirium, and the fever still strong upon her. So when we see persons inactive as to holiness, we cannot believe that they are saved; or when we see them full of empty excitement about religion, but not serving God in the common acts of life, we think them to be in the delirium of a sinful presumption, but cannot regard them as healed by the cooling, calming hand of the Great Physician, who, when he puts out the fever, restores the soul to quiet and peace. The woman gave a much better proof than any of these could be. This leads us to remark that the only irresistible proof with on-lookers of a person being spiritually healed by Christ, must be found in the change in his conduct, and especially in his henceforth living to serve Christ, and to be obedient to him. This is the test and nothing short of it.

When we see holy living in the man who was once a gross offender, we are quite sure that Christ has healed him, because the man begins to do what he could not have done before. Perhaps this poor fevered woman might have made some shift to have done something for the Saviour, but the unconverted man is dead in trespasses and sin; he may go through forms of religion, but real holiness is far above and out of his sight; he cannot obey the law of God; his nature is set against it; he is unable to walk in the way of God's commandments; therefore, when we see him doing so, we exclaim, "This is the finger of God; God has healed that man, or else he would not be able to live as he is now living." Besides, the unconverted man before conversion hates holiness, he is disinclined to it, so that in his case, when his life becomes pure and upright, when he spends and is spent in the service of Jesus Christ, you know that this must be the work of the Holy Spirit in his soul, for nothing else could have changed his nature but the same Omnipotence which first of all created him. God's hand is in that conversion, which is proved by the holiness of the man's outward character. Beside this, while the sinner is disinclined to everything that is holy, we know that he especially despises the Saviour, and thinks little of his people; consequently, when a man is brought to serve the Saviour, and to be willing to do good to the children of God for Christ's sake, there is a sure mark that a miracle has been wrought in him which has touched the secret springs of his being, and altogether transformed him. The woman's rising up to minister to our Lord was a sure sign of returned health, and the change of outward character which leads a man to devote himself to the service of Christ, is even more infallibly a proof of true salvation.

I want you to note however, dear friends, for a moment, the nature of the acts which this restored woman performed, because they are symbolical of the best form of actions by which to judge of a person's being renewed. Her duties were humble ones. She was probably the



head of the household, and she began at once to discharge the duties of a housewife : duties unostentatious and commonplace. Many persons who profess to be converted aspire at once to preaching ; a pulpit for them is the main thing, and a large congregation is their ambition. They must needs do some great thing, and occupy the chief seat in the synagogue. But this good woman did not think of preaching ; women are always best when they don't ; but she thought of washing Christ's feet and preparing him necessary food, which was her proper business. To these kind but simple actions she devoted herself. Attention to humble duties is a better sign of grace than an ambition for lofty and elevated works. There is probably far more grace in the loving service of a mother towards Christ in bringing up her children in the fear of God, than there might be if she were well known as taking a leading part in great public movements ; there may be more service for Christ done by a workman in discharging his duties as such, and trying to do good to his fellow workmen, than if he aspired to become a great leader of the minds and thoughts of others. Of course there are exceptions, for glorious was Deborah and great shall be her name in Israel, and those who are sent of God to lead his church shall not be without their reward, but even then when they have to look for personal evidences of grace they never dare say, " We know that we are passed from death unto life because we preach the gospel," for they remember that Judas did the same ; they never say, " We are confident of salvation because God has wrought wonders by us," for they remember that the son of perdition had the same distinction ; but they fall back upon the same evidences which prove the truth of the religion of humbler people, they rejoice in testimonies common to all the elect. " We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." The humbler graces and duties are the best tests. Hypocrites mimic all public duties, but the private and concealed life of true godliness they cannot counterfeit ; and because they cannot " do so with their enchantments " we feel like the men of Egypt, that " this is the finger of God."

Remember, too, that this good woman attended to home duties. She did not go down the street a hundred yards off to glorify Christ ; she, I dare say, did that afterwards ; but she began at home : charity begins there and so should piety. That is the best religion which is most at home at home. Grace which smiles around the family hearth is grace indeed. If your own household cannot see that you are godly, depend upon it nobody else can ; and if your parents or children have grave doubts about the sincerity of your religion, I am afraid you ought to have grave doubts about it yourself. Peter's mother-in-law ministered to Christ at home, and that was clear evidence of her being restored to health, and in your case it will be the best witness to your conversion if you serve Jesus in the bosom of your family and make your house the dwelling place of all that is kind and good and holy.

She attended to suitable duties, duties consistent with her sex and condition. She did not try to be what God had not made her, but did what she could. She attended to natural duties, duties which suggested themselves in a moment, and were not far fetched and fanciful. She set about doing present duties required there and then, and did not wait to

serve the Lord in a year's time. In a quiet natural manner, she pursued her calling as if it never occurred to her to do otherwise. If somebody had thought it wonderful that she ministered to Christ, she would have been surprised at them. It seemed to her the most natural thing for her to do. Dear soul, I dare say while lying in bed sick there were fifty things she would have liked to have done—what housewife would not in such a case see many grievous arrears of work all around her?—but Jesus being there, no sooner did she feel her health returned than she at once arose to discharge the offices of grateful hospitality, as a matter of course. How could she do otherwise but wait upon Jesus and his friends. Now, observe, that those good works which prove a man to be a Christian are not such as he could boast of, he does them as a matter of course; he feels he could not do otherwise, and wonders that anybody else can. Is he born of God? He yearns to teach others about the Saviour; he cannot help it; his tongue wants to be talking about Jesus. Then he begins to give of his substance to the poor; it does not strike him as being at all a remarkable or extraordinary thing; he wonders anyone can help being generous to real need. Now, he begins to enquire about the little children in the neighbourhood; can he get them into the Sunday-school? Or he occupies himself with some other form of Christian work, and he does it because he feels it to be inevitable for him to do so; it is one of the instincts of the new nature which God the Holy Spirit has implanted in him. Those natural, commonplace duties which grow out of holy instincts within, are the best evidence of a work of grace: the more genuinely natural and unstrained the better. Vain is the religion which aims at unnatural conditions, and makes much of distinctions of a needless kind. What is there in a peculiar garb, or affectation of speech, or separation of residence? These minister to our own vainglory; true godliness aims not at her own honour, but is content to labour among the many, to be a man among men, yet differing in nothing but character. Ours it is, as the true salt, to mingle with the masses; not to seek a proud isolation. We are men, not monks; and our sisters are women, not nuns. All that interests men interests us, we only differ from our race by being conformed to the image of Jesus, while they wear the image of the fallen Adam. May God grant us grace to exhibit the Christianity of common life, the real and practical Christianity of every day. Christianity is not with hermits in their cells, nor nuns in their convents, nor priests in their cloisters; those are all cowardly soldiers who shun the battle of life, but the true faith is the joy and strength of all who love the Lord and fight his battles on the broad plains of life. True religion must be manifested in your workshops, in your houses, in the streets, and in the fields, in the nursery and in the parlour. This celestial flower reveals its richest perfume, not in the conservatories of unnatural seclusion, but under the clear sky of human life, for “as a flower of the field so it flourishes,” where God has planted it.

One other point before leaving this; these things become a conclusive proof of grace in the heart, when they are voluntarily rendered as this good woman's ministry was. I do not read that she was asked to do anything for Christ, but it suggested itself to her at once, without command or request. Her work was done promptly, for “*immediately* she

arose" and did it. She no sooner had power to work than the occasion was seized without delay. Promptness is the soul of obedience: "I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments." I doubt not she did her ministering cheerfully. There is all the air of cheerfulness about the words "She arose," it reads as if with alacrity, vigour, sprightliness, and eagerness she entered into the service. That is the best service for God that is done promptly, without delay; voluntarily, without pressing; generously, without grudging; heartily, without complaining. With us it is not "This you should do, and this you must do," but we serve Jesus because we love to do so, and labour for him is to us a joy and a delight.

II. I have thus brought before you the first point of our discourse, now notice the second one, which is most interesting. This woman's ministry for Christ and his disciples showed, secondly, **THE PERFECTION OF HER CURE**. It may not strike you for a moment, but just think. She was sick with a fever. Supposing a prophet should visit your house and restore your friend from a great fever; yet the person healed would not be able to rise from the bed for some time; fever leaves extreme weakness behind, and when the fever itself is entirely gone, it needs sometwo or three weeks, and sometimes more, before the person who has been prostrated by it will be able to go about his daily work. This was healing like a God indeed, a divine work emphatically, because the woman was so healed that all her weakness vanished, and she was able to proceed to her work without difficulty. And, beloved, it is one mark of a work of grace in the soul when the converted man becomes at once a servant of Christ. The human theory of moral reformations makes time a great element in its operations. If you are to reclaim a great offender you must win him from one vice first, and then from another; you must put him through a process of education by which he gradually perceives that what he has been accustomed to do is bad for himself, and wakes up to the conviction that honesty and sobriety will be the best for his own profit. Time is required by the moral reformer, or he cannot develop his plans. He ridicules the idea of effecting anything in an hour or two. Man, the creature of time, must have time for the accomplishment of his very imperfect works,—but to the eternal God time is nothing. His miracles annihilate time. A man who is converted is cured at once of his sins; the tap root of his sins is cut away there and then, and though some of his sins linger, yet every one has received the stroke which will prove its deathblow. Once for all, in a moment, when a man believes and is born again, the axe is laid at the root of all the evil trees within him, sin is there and then condemned to die; and what is more, all graces are in a moment implanted in the soul, not in perfection—they will have to grow,—but they are all sown in the man in a moment in embryo, so that the renewed sinner, though he has only been born again five minutes, has within him the embryo of the perfect saint who shall stand before the throne of God; and this is one of the marvels which certify the work to be divine. For note, beloved, those who have just been converted to God can worship God, can praise God, can pray to God, can love God, though they were strangers to these things up to then; and some of the sweetest worship that God himself ever hears comes from the hearts of



the newly regenerate. Of all the prayers that strike the Christian's ear like music, surely among the sweetest are the broken pleadings of those who have just found the Saviour. I delight in the expressions of faith of elderly and full-grown Christians,—they are exceedingly instructive and precious; but, oh! that first grip of the hand, that first flash of the eye, that first tear of joy, when a soul has seen Christ for the first time, and stands astonished at the matchless vision of incarnate love! Why, there is no worship sweeter beneath the sun! The woman arises at once and ministers to Christ, and the sinner arises at once and begins to adore Christ. Did not I say that the newly-converted sinner can love, and does love his Lord as soon as ever he is born to God? I must correct myself. He not only can and does love, but he loves beyond most others, for very seldom does men's after-love exceed in fervency the love of their espousals, which is also called their first love. This standard love is implanted in us at once, all blooming and full of perfume. Hating Christ one minute, hearts have been brought to be ravished with his love the next; the men were enemies to God an hour ago, and now they could die to defend his gospel, so changed are their natures. This must be a divine work. If that which was waterflood, quenching every spark of fire, should suddenly blaze and glow like Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, God alone could have wrought the change. Say who has turned the waters of raging hatred into the flame of holy love? Who has done it but the mighty God himself? If the iceberg suddenly becomes a flaming beacon, who can have wrought this marvel but the Miracle Worker who alone doeth great wonders? Glory be to God we often see it, and he shall have the praise of it! How pure some men's lives become at conversion,—pure at once, though before they were polluted with every vice. Certain sins we may have to fight with all our lives, but a renewed man usually has no difficulty whatever with the grosser sins. For instance, I have known a man habituated to blasphemy, who probably never did since he was a boy speak a dozen sentences without an oath, and yet, after he has been converted, the profane habit has never molested him. We have known some who have been troubled with a ferocious temper which made them like demons, but from the moment of conversion they have been remarkable for their singular gentleness and meekness. We have known misers instantly display the freest generosity, and thieves become scrupulously honest. Though the temptation to old sin may return, yet for the most part those who have been saved from gross vices have been the greatest loathers of the very mention or name of their former abominations. Such is the work of God in the soul, that these evils are driven out at once and sent right away, and then the man who before had been an adept in all manner of evil work becomes as much an expert in all manner of holy labour. He may not at once have picked up the technicalities of religion—perhaps it would be as well he never did—but he gets to the bottom of it, the secret of it, and goes to work for Jesus Christ in his own fashion and way, with wonderful wisdom and extraordinary skill from the very first. Some of the best evangelists we have ever seen have been those who learned at once to evangelise, who seemed to have known it from the first hour in which they were converted to God, taking to it from inward love as the young swans take to the stream. Some of the

best persons who speak to others about their souls privately, began to do so immediately they found the Saviour, and attained to the sacred art—and a blessed art it is—as though they were in a moment touched by the hand of God and inspired for the service he meant them to render. Now, what is the practical drift of this second remark but this? As it proved the real divinity of this woman's cure that she was able immediately to go to work for Christ, so you young converts should hold the honour of Christ in great esteem, and prove the reality of his grace in your souls by bringing forth immediate fruit to his honour. See if you cannot at once rise and minister to him. Be as zealous as the dying thief; he had no sooner known Christ than he confessed him, and he did the only thing he could do for his dying Lord, he rebuked the other malefactor who had reviled the Saviour. Oh, if you love Jesus, do not wait till you have been ten years Christians; serve him now. If you are healed from sin, do not wait for experience; with your inexperience of everything except the new birth, go and seek the good of others. Do not suppose you must be trained for this war through a long process of spiritual drill, but march forward at once with all your heart and soul, in the freshness of your newly-given life. It may be you will achieve greater triumphs than some of the older ones; for, alas! some of them are dry and sapless, and have long forgotten their early days of enthusiasm. In too many Christians the peach has lost its bloom, the flower has withered from the stem; they are not now loving and earnest, but they have declined into the sere and yellow leaf of religion. Go ye with the dew of the morning still upon your spirit, and I know not what great and gracious works the Lord may do by you.

III. Now we pass on to a third head briefly. Peter's wife's mother in ministering to Christ proved **HER OWN GRATITUDE**. Her acts of hospitality were an exhibition of her thankfulness. Brethren, if we want to evidence our gratitude to Christ we had better do it in the same way as she did. There is no record of her having fallen at Jesus' feet, and saying, "Blessed be thy name;" she may have done so: the Bible has not room for many holy expressions, though it finds space for gracious acts. I do not know that she sat down and sang a hymn, perhaps she did: good women before her have done so, and I hope they will after her; but the hymn is not recorded: Holy Scripture has not room for all the hymns which good people sing, but it finds a corner for the actions which they perform. We have the Acts of the Apostles, though we have not the devotional emotions, the hymns, or the pious resolutions of the apostles. This good woman proved her gratitude by tangible deeds. Did she not say to herself, "The Lord has served me; I will serve him!" It never strikes an awakened person that mere words are a fit return for the grace of God. Can you give for the Lord's healing fruit a handful of mere leaves from the tree of talk? It looks like mockery. Give him the leaves, but wrap the fruit up within them. Let him have true action, consecrated service, for this is the fittest fruit of a grateful heart.

Observe that it is not said that she waited upon Christ before she was healed. The fevered patient is first restored, and then she begins to minister. I am far from exhorting any of you to serve Christ in your

lives if your inner life be not first of all renewed by him. There must be a regenerated heart through his blessed touch, or else a renewed life may be imitated but cannot be truly possessed. First the healing, then the serving. The healing is first, but note well that the serving follows close at its heels. If thou be saved, arise and work out thine own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in thee to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Since the light is now kindled, let it shine forth from thee ; since Christ has opened in thy soul a well of living waters, let it flow out of the midst of thee, as a river of water, for his service and the benefit of thy fellowmen.

This good soul knew to what end she had been raised up. She knew *from whom* she had received the healing : it was from the Lord alone. She knew *from what* she was restored, namely, from the very jaws of death. She knew *to what* she was restored, for she felt that health and strength had returned to her, and, therefore, she guessed rightly *for what* she was restored, namely, that she might wait upon the Lord. Thou, my brother, art saved from hell, thou art lifted up into spiritual life and acceptance, thou art ennobled and made an heir of heaven ; what was this done for but that thou mightest minister to thy Lord here, and glorify him hereafter ? Our gratitude ought to teach us the divine object of grace, and we ought to take care that it be attained. The Lord cannot have saved us at such an expense as the death of his own Son, for any reason less than that we should live unto him. What is the reckoning of all our grateful hearts about this ? Is it not this, that if we are bought with a price, we are not our own : that if the Holy Spirit has given us a new nature, it must be that we should lead a new life, and that our new life must be consecrated to him who is the author of it ? Beloved, true gratitude always leads us to serve, and it distinctly makes our healing Lord the object of our service ; it puts him in the forefront. "She arose and ministered unto them." To him first, and to his disciples next—to the Head, and for the Head's sake to all the members ; to the Redeemer, and because of him to all the redeemed. I put to each one here present who has been healed from sin and saved from spiritual death by Christ, this question—What art thou rendering unto thy Lord ? What art thou doing for him ? Begin with him ; do it as unto him ; do what thou doest in his presence, and present it at his dear feet ; then I know thou wilt be doing something for his people too : his poor thou wilt befriend, his backsliding ones thou wilt seek to gather in, his sick ones thou wilt visit, his comfortless ones thou wilt console, his wandering ones—as yet uncalled—thou wilt seek after them ; his lost sheep, thine anxieties will go out for them ; thou wilt minister to him and to his chosen, to all the members of his body. What art thou doing, brother ? What art thou doing, sister ? I do not ask you now in my own name, for I am no master of yours, neither are ye accountable to me, but I ask it in the name of him whose hands were pierced for you, and whose heart was set abroad by the soldier's spear for your redemption. Oh, what are you doing for him ? Do you love him ? If you love him feed his lambs and his sheep. If you love, serve ; and if you serve, serve *him* first, and serve his children and his people next, and you will prove your gratitude.



IV. But now, lastly, this woman's ministering to Christ proved in the fourth place **THE CONDESCENSION OF THE PHYSICIAN**. He who healed her of the fever did not need her to minister to him; he who had power to heal diseases had certainly power to subsist without human ministry. If Christ could raise her up he must be omnipotent and divine, what need then had he of a woman's service? Might he not have used the grand style of the Old Testament, and said, "If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the cattle on a thousand hills are mine;" but instead of this the mighty Master of all angels condescended to be waited upon by a poor female. It was great condescension on Christ's part that he needed ministry, and great gentleness that he so often chose woman's ministry; he came to earth and the first garments of his infancy were wrapped about him by a woman's hands, and here he dwelt till at last he died, and holy women bound him up in the cerements of the tomb and laid him in the sepulchre. Matchless marvel was this of condescension, that he who is almighty and ever-blessed should stoop from heaven to need the ministry of human beings. He has ministered to us by humbling himself to accept mortal ministry.

Peter's wife's mother was one of the despised poor, but Jesus honoured her. What was she but a fisherman's wife, at any rate the mother of a fisherman's wife, a poor, obscure, illiterate woman, yet Christ allowed her to wait upon him, an honour which Herodias the royal princess never had. So the Lord to-day should be beloved of us for his humility in allowing us to wait upon him, in allowing *me*, in allowing *you*, to do anything for his dear name's sake. I do not wonder that Christ allowed Paul and Peter and John to serve him, but that he should suffer *me* to do it! I am overwhelmed with astonishment at it! Do not you marvel also? It seems easy enough to believe that the blessed Virgin and Mary Magdalene and other holy women were honoured of God; but that you, dear sister, should be allowed to take a part in his service, is not this marvellous? Will you not bless him, and minister with the utmost cheerfulness because you feel it to be so great a grace?

Is it not gracious on our Lord's part to leave room in his church for ministry? Suppose, now, the Lord had made all his people rich: then there would be no room for the generosity of his people to help his poor saints, and you would not have had the opportunity of proving your love to him as now you can. Suppose he had converted all his elect by the secret working of his Spirit without any teaching, then he would not have wanted you in the Sunday School, nor you with your tracts, nor me with my sermons, and we should have had nothing to do for Christ; we should have been sighing and crying, "The good Master has not permitted us to give him anything? Why, on our birthdays our little children love to give their father something, if it is only a bunch of flowers out of the garden, or a fourpenny piece with a hole in it; they like to do it to show their love; and wise parents will be sure to let their children do such things for them. So is it with our great Father in heaven. What are our Sunday-school teachings and our preachings, and all that, but these cracked fourpenny pieces? Just nothing at all; but the Lord allows us to do his work for his own love's sake. His love to us finds a

sweetness in our love to him. I am most thankful that in the church there is room for such a variety of ministries. Some brethren are so queerly constituted that I cannot tell what they were made for ; but I believe if they are God's people there is a place for them in his spiritual temple. A man who was accustomed to buy timber and work it up, on one occasion found a very crooked stick of wood in his bargain, and said to his son as he put it aside, "I cannot tell, John, whatever I shall do with it; it is the ugliest shaped piece I ever bought in my life;" but it so happened while building a barn that he wanted a timber exactly of that shape, and it fitted in so thoroughly well that he said, "It really seems as if that tree grew on purpose for that corner." So our gracious Lord has arranged his church, so that every crooked stick will fit in somewhere or other, if it be only a tree of his own right hand planting: he has made it with a purpose, and knows when it will answer that purpose. How this ought to rebuke any who say, "I do not see what I can do." Dear friend, there is a peculiar work for you; find it out,—and methinks it will not be far off: the exercise of a little reflection will soon enable you to discover it. Be grateful that this is a certain fact, without exception, that every child of God who has been healed has some ministry which he can render to Christ, and which he ought to render at once. May the Lord give to everyone of you to show your gratitude in this way, and while you do it, let it always be in an adoring spirit, saying, "Lord, I thank thee I am allowed to go to my Sunday-school class." Do not look at your work as a burden: say, "Lord, I thank thee I am permitted to do it." "O God, I bless thee that I am allowed to go round that little district and call at the houses." You Bible-women, bless God that he has let you be Bible-women: and you city missionaries, thank God that you are allowed to be city missionaries. "Oh," saith one, "I can hardly do that because I suffer so much abuse and so much ill-treatment." Bless God, dear brother, that he counts you worthy to suffer for his name's sake. You know the old story of Sir Walter Raleigh. When Queen Elizabeth, one day, came to a miry place in the road, he took off his cloak for her to walk upon. Did he regret it? No, he was delighted at it, and half the court wished for another muddy place that they might be able to do the same. Oh, you that love your Lord, be willing to lie down for Christ's sake, and pave the miry parts of the way by being despised for his name's sake. This honour you should covet, and should not shun. Arise, and minister ye healed ones; and as for you who are not healed, may you believe in him who is able to restore you with his touch. He is mighty to save. Believe in him and you shall live. Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON, Luke iv.