

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE LIFTING UP OF THE BOWED DOWN.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 14TH, 1878, BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

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“And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”—Luke xiii. 10—13.

I BELIEVE that the infirmity of this woman was not only physical but spiritual: her outward appearance was the index of her deep and long-continued depression of mind. She was bent double as to her body, and she was bowed down by sadness as to her mind. There is always a sympathy between body and soul, but it is not always so plainly seen as in her case; many sad sights would meet us on all hands if it were so. Imagine for a moment what would be the result upon the present congregation if our outward forms were to set forth our inward states. If some one having an eye like that of the Saviour could gaze upon us now, and could see the inward in the outward, what would be the appearance of this crowd? Very deplorable sights would be seen, for in many a pew dead persons would be sitting, looking forth from the glassy eyes of death, bearing the semblance of life and a name to live, but all the while being dead as to spiritual things. My friend, you would shudder as you found yourself placed next to a corpse. Alas, the corpse would not shudder, but would remain as insensible as ungodly persons usually are, though the precious truth of the gospel rings in their ears—ears which hear but hear in vain. A large number of souls will be found in all congregations, “dead in trespasses and sins,” and yet sitting as God’s people sit, and not to be discerned from the living in Zion. Even in those cases in which there is spiritual life the aspect would not be altogether lovely. Here we should see a man blind, and there another another maimed; and a third twisted from perfect uprightness. Spiritual deformity assumes many forms, and each form is painful to look upon.

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A paralysed man with a trembling faith, set forth by a trembling body, would be an uncomfortable neighbour, and a person subject to fits of passion or despair would be equally undesirable if his body suffered from fits also. How sad it would be to have around us persons with a fever upon them, or shivering with ague, hot and cold by turns, burning almost to fanaticism at one moment and then chilled as with a northern wind with utter indifference. I will not try to sketch in further detail the halt, lame, blind and impotent folk who are assembled in this Bethesda. Surely if the flesh were shaped according to the spirit this Tabernacle would be turned into an hospital, and each man would flee from his fellow, and wish to run from himself. If to any one of us our inward ailments were to be set forth upon our brow, I warrant you we should not linger long at the glass, nor scarcely dare to think upon the wretched objects which there our eyes would behold. Let us quit the imaginary scene with this consoling thought, that Jesus is among us notwithstanding that we be sick folk, and although he sees nothing to delight his eye if he judgeth us according to the law, yet, since his mercy delights to relieve human misery, there is abundant scope for him here in the midst of these thousands of ailing souls.

In that synagogue on the Sabbath this poor woman described in the text must have been one of the least observed. Her particular disease would render her very short in stature ; she was dwarfed to almost half her original height, and in consequence, like other very short persons, she would be almost lost in a standing crowd. A person so bent down as she was might have come in and gone out and not have been noticed by anyone standing upon the floor of the meeting-place ; but I can imagine that our Lord occupied a somewhat elevated position, as he was teaching in the synagogue, for he had probably gone to one of the higher places for the greater convenience of being seen and heard, and for this reason he could more readily see her than others could. Jesus always occupies a place from which he can spy out those who are bowed down. His quick eye did not miss its mark. She, poor soul, was naturally the least observed of all the people in the company, yet was she the most observed, for our Lord's gracious eye glanced over all the rest, but it lighted upon her with fixed regard. There his tender look remained till he had wrought the deed of love. Peradventure, there is some one in the crowd this morning the least observed of anybody, who is yet noticed by the Saviour ; for he seeth not as man seeth, but observes most those whom man passes over as beneath his regard. Nobody knows you, nobody cares for you ; your peculiar trouble is quite unknown, and you would not reveal it for the world. You feel quite alone ; there is no solitude like that which is to be found in a dense throng ; and you are in that solitude now. Be not, however, quite despairing, for you have a friend left. The preacher's heart is going after you, but that will little help you : there is far more joy in the fact that as our Master observed most the least observed one on that Sabbath in the synagogue, so we trust he will do this day, and his eye shall light on you, even you. He will not pass you by, but will deal out a special Sabbath blessing to your weary heart. Though by yourself accounted to be among the last, you shall now be put upon the first by the Lord's working a notable miracle of love upon you. In the hope that this may be so we will proceed, by the help of



the Holy Spirit, to look into the gracious deed which was done to this poor woman.

I. Our first subject for consideration is, THE BOWING DOWN OF THE AFFLICTED. We read of this woman that "she had a spirit of infirmity and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself." Upon which we remark first, that *she had lost all her natural brightness*. I can imagine that when she was a girl she was light of foot as a young roe, that her face was dimpled with many a smile, and that her eyes flashed with childish glee. She had her share of the brightness and beauty of youth, and walked erect like others of her race, looking up to the sun by day, and to the sparkling stars at night, rejoicing in all around her, and feeling life to be a joy. But there gradually crept over her an infirmity which dragged her down, probably a weakness of the spine: either the muscles and ligatures began to tighten so that she was bound together, and drawn more and more towards herself and towards the earth; or else the muscles commenced to relax, so that she could not retain the perpendicular position, and her body dropped forward more and more. I suppose either of these causes might cause her to be bowed together, so that she could in nowise lift herself up. At any rate, for eighteen years she had not gazed upon the sun; for eighteen years no star of night had gladdened her eye; her face was drawn downward towards the dust, and all the light of her life was dim: she walked about as if she were searching for a grave, and I do not doubt she often felt that it would have been gladness to have found one. She was as truly fettered as if bound in iron, and as much in prison as if surrounded by stone walls. Alas, we know certain of the children of God who are at this moment in much the same condition. They are perpetually bowed down, and though they recollect happier days the memory only serves to deepen their present gloom. They sometimes sing in the minor key:

"Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the sweet refreshing view  
Of Jesus and his word?  
"What blissful hours I then enjoyed!  
How sweet their memory still!  
But they have left an aching void  
The world can never fill."

They seldom enter into communion with God now; seldom or never behold the face of the Well-beloved. They try to hold on by believing, and they succeed; but they have little peace, little comfort, little joy: they have lost the crown and flower of spiritual life, though that life still remains. I feel certain that I am addressing more than two or three who are in such a plight at this moment, and I pray the Comforter to bless my discourse to them.

This poor woman was *bowed towards herself and towards that which was depressing*. She seemed to grow downwards; her life was stooping; she bent lower and lower and lower, as the weight of years pressed upon her. Her looks were all earthward; nothing heavenly, nothing bright could come before her eyes; her views were narrowed to the dust, and to the grave. So are there some of God's people whose thoughts sink evermore



like lead, and their feelings run in a deep groove, cutting evermore a lower channel. You cannot give them delight, but you can readily cause them alarm : by a strange art they squeeze the juice of sorrow from the clusters of Eshcol ; where others would leap for joy they stoop for very grief, for they draw the unhappy inference that joyous things are not meant for the like of them. Cordials expressly prepared for mourners they dare not accept, and the more comforting they are the more are they afraid to appropriate them. If there is a dark passage in the word of God they are sure to read it, and say, "That applies to me" : if there is a thundering portion in a sermon they recollect every syllable of it, and although they wonder how the preacher knows them so well, yet they are sure that he aimed every word at them. If anything occurs in providence, either adverse or propitious, instead of reading it as a token for good, whether they might rationally do so or not, they manage to translate it into a sign of evil. "All these things are against me," say they, for they can see nothing but the earth, and can imagine nothing but fear and distress.

We have known certain prudent, but somewhat unfeeling, persons blame these people, and chide them for being low spirited ; and that brings us to notice next, *that she could not lift up herself*. There was no use in blaming her. There may have been a time, perhaps, when her older sisters said, "Sister, you should keep yourself more upright ; you should not be so round shouldered ; you are getting quite out of figure ; you must be careful or you will become deformed." Dear me, what good advice some people can give ! Advice is usually given gratis, and this is very proper, since in most cases that is its full value. Advice given to persons who become depressed in spirit is usually unwise, and causes pain and aggravation of spirit. I sometimes wish that those who are so ready with their advice had themselves suffered a little, for then, perhaps, they would have the wisdom to hold their tongues. Of what use is it to advise a blind person to see, or to tell one who cannot lift up herself that she ought to be upright, and should not look so much upon the earth ? This is a needless increase of misery. Some persons who pretend to be comforters might more fitly be classed with tormentors. A spiritual infirmity is as real as a physical one. When Satan binds a soul it is as truly bound as when a man binds an ox or an ass. It cannot get free, it is of necessity in bondage ; and that was the condition of this poor woman. I may be speaking to some who have bravely attempted to rally their spirits : they have tried change of scene, they have gone into godly company, they have asked Christian people to comfort them, they have frequented the house of God, and read consoling books ; but still they are bound, and there is no disputing it. As one that poureth vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a sad heart : there is an incongruity about the choicest joys when forced upon broken spirits. Some distressed souls are so sick that they abhor all manner of meat, and draw near unto the gates of death. Yet, if any one of my hearers be in this plight he may not despair, for Jesus can lift up those who are most bowed down.

The worst point, perhaps, about the poor woman's case was that *she had borne her trouble for eighteen years*, and therefore her disease was chronic and her illness confirmed. Eighteen years ! It is a long, long



time. Eighteen years of happiness!—the years fly like Mercuries, with wings to their heels: they come, and they are gone. Eighteen years of happy life,—how short a span! But eighteen years of pain, eighteen years of being bowed down to the earth, eighteen years in which the body approximated rather to the fashion of a brute than to that of a man, what a period this must be! Eighteen long years—each with twelve dreary months dragging like a chain behind it! She had been eighteen years under the bond of the devil; what a woe was this! Can a child of God be eighteen years in despondency? I am bound to answer “yes.” There is one instance, that of Mr. Timothy Rogers, who has written a book upon Religious Melancholy, a very wonderful book too, who was, I think, twenty-eight years in despondency: he tells the story himself, and there can be no question as to his accuracy. Similar instances are well known to those familiar with religious biographies. Individuals have been locked up for many years in the gloomy den of despair, and yet after all have been singularly brought out into joy and comfort. Eighteen years’ despondency must be a frightful affliction, and yet there is an escape out of it, for though the devil may take eighteen years to forge a chain, it does not take our blessed Lord eighteen minutes to break it. He can soon set the captive free. Build, build thy dungeons, O Fiend of Hell, and lay the foundations deep, and place the courses of granite so fast together that none can stir a stone of thy fabric; but when HE comes, thy Master who will destroy all thy works, HE doth but speak, and like the unsubstantial fabric of a vision thy Bastille vanishes into thin air. Eighteen years of melancholy do not prove that Jesus cannot set the captive free; they only offer him an opportunity for displaying his gracious power.

Note further about this poor woman, that bowed down as she was both in mind and body, *she yet frequented the house of prayer*. Our Lord was in the synagogue, and there was she. She might very well have said, “It is very painful for me to go into a public place; I ought to be excused.” But no, there she was. Dear child of God, the devil has sometimes suggested to you that it is vain for you to go any more to hear the word. Go all the same. He knows you are likely to escape from his hands so long as you hear the word, and therefore if he can keep you away he will do so. It was while in the house of prayer that this woman found her liberty, and there *you* may find it; therefore still continue to go up to the house of the Lord, come what may.

*All this while, too, she was a daughter of Abraham.* The devil had tied her up like an ox or an ass, but he could not take away her privileged character. She was still a daughter of Abraham, still a believing soul trusting in God by humble faith. When the Saviour healed her he did not say, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” There was no particular sin in the case. He did not address her as he did those whose infirmity had been caused by sin; for, notwithstanding her being thus bowed down, all she needed was comfort, not rebuke. Her heart was right with God. I know it was, for the moment she was healed she began to glorify God, which showed that she was ready for it, and that the praise was waiting in her spirit for the glad opportunity. In going up to the house of God, she felt some measure of comfort, though for eighteen years she was bowed down. Where else should she have gone? What good could she



have gained by staying at home? A sick child is best in its father's house, and she was best where prayer was wont to be made.

Here, then, is a picture of what may still be seen among the sons of men, and may possibly be your case, dear hearer. May the Holy Spirit bless this description to your hearts' encouragement.

II. I invite you, secondly, to notice THE HAND OF SATAN IN THIS BONDAGE. We should not have known it if our Lord had not told us, that it was Satan who had bound this poor woman for eighteen years. *He must have bound her very cunningly to make the knot hold all that time*, for he does not appear to have possessed her. You notice in reading the evangelists that our Lord never laid his hand on a person possessed with a devil. Satan had not *possessed* her, but he had fallen upon her once upon a time eighteen years before, and bound her up as men tie a beast in its stable, and she had not been able to get free all that while. The devil can tie in a moment a knot which you and I cannot unloose in eighteen years. He had in this case so securely fastened his victim that no power of herself or others could avail: in the same way when permitted he can tie up any one of God's own people in a very short time, and by almost any means. Perhaps one word from a preacher, which was never meant to cause sadness, may make a heart wretched; one single sentence out of a good book, or one misunderstood passage of Scripture, may be quite enough in Satan's cunning hand to fasten up a child of God in a long bondage.

*Satan had bound the woman to herself and to the earth.* There is a cruel way of tying a beast which is somewhat after the same fashion: I have seen a poor animal's head fastened to its knee or foot, and somewhat after that fashion Satan had bound the woman downward to herself. So there are some children of God whose thoughts are all about themselves: they have turned their eyes so that they look inside and see only the transactions of the little world within themselves. They are always lamenting their own infirmities, always mourning their own corruptions, always watching their own emotions. The one and only subject of their thoughts is their own condition. If they ever change the scene and turn to another subject it is only to gaze upon the earth beneath them, to groan over this poor world with its sorrows, its miseries, its sins, and its disappointments. Thus they are tied to themselves and to the earth, and cannot look up to Christ as they should, nor let the sunlight of his love shine full upon them. They go mourning without the sun, pressed down with cares and burdens. Our Lord uses the figure of an ox or an ass tied up, and he says that even on the Sabbath its owner would loose it for watering.

*This poor woman was restrained from what her soul needed.* She was like an ass or an ox which cannot get to the trough to drink. She knew the promises, she heard them read every Sabbath day; she went to the synagogue and heard of him who comes to loose the captives; but she could not rejoice in the promise or enter into liberty. So are there multitudes of God's dear people who are fastened to themselves and cannot get to watering, cannot drink from the river of life, nor find consolation in the Scriptures. They know how precious the gospel is, and how consolatory are the blessings of the covenant, but they cannot enjoy the



consolations or the blessings. Oh that they could. They sigh and cry, but they feel themselves to be bound.

There is a saving clause here. Satan had done a good deal to the poor woman, but *he had done all he could do*. You may rest assured that whenever Satan smites a child of God he never spares his strength. He knows nothing of mercy, neither does any other consideration restrain him. When the Lord delivered Job into Satan's hand for a time, what destruction and havoc he made with Job's property. He did not save him chick or child, or sheep, or goat, or camel, or ox; but he smote him right and left, and caused ruin to his whole estate. When, under a second permit, he came to touch him in his bone and in his flesh, nothing would satisfy the devil but covering him from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head with sore boils and blains. He might have pained him quite sufficiently by torturing one part of his body, but this would not suffice, he must glut himself with vengeance. The devil would do all he could, and therefore he covered him with running sores. Yet, as in Job's case, there was a limit, so was there here; Satan had bound this woman, but he had not killed her. He might bend her towards the grave, but he could not bend her into it; he might make her droop over till she was bent double, but he could not take away her poor feeble life: with all his infernal craft he could not make her die before her time. Moreover, she was still a woman, and he could not make a beast of her, notwithstanding that she was thus bowed down into the form of the brute. Even so the devil cannot destroy you, O child of God. He can smite you, but he cannot slay you. He worries those whom he cannot destroy, and feels a malicious joy in so doing. He knows there is no hope of your destruction, for you are beyond shot of his gun; but if he cannot wound you with the shot he will frighten you with the powder if he can. If he cannot slay he will bind, as if for the slaughter; ay, and he knows how to make a poor soul feel a thousand deaths in fearing one. But all this while Satan was quite unable to touch this poor woman as to her true standing: she was a daughter of Abraham eighteen years before when first the devil attacked her, and she was a daughter of Abraham eighteen years afterwards, when the fiend had done his worst. And you, dear heart, if you should never have a comfortable sense of the Lord's love for eighteen years, are still his beloved; and if never once he should give you any token of his love which you could sensibly enjoy, and if by reason of bewilderment and distraction you should keep on writing bitter things against yourself all this while, yet still your name is on the hands of Christ, where none can erase it. You belong to Jesus, and none shall pluck you out of his hands. The devil may bind you fast, but Christ has bound you faster still with cords of everlasting love, which must and shall hold you to the end.

That poor woman was being prepared, even by the agency of the devil, to glorify God. Nobody in the synagogue could glorify God as she could when she was at last set free. Every year out of the eighteen gave emphasis to the utterance of her thanksgiving. The deeper her sorrow the sweeter her song. I should like to have been there that morning, to have heard her tell the story of the emancipating power of the Christ of God. The devil must have felt that he had lost all his trouble, and he must have regretted that he had not let her alone all the



eighteen years, since he had only been qualifying her thereby to tell out the more sweetly the story of Jesus' wondrous power.

III. I want you to notice in the third place **THE LIBERATOR AT HIS WORK**. We have seen the woman bound by the devil, but here comes the Liberator, and the first thing we read of him is that *he saw her*. His eyes looked round, reading every heart as he glanced from one to another. At last he saw the woman. Yes, that was the very one he was seeking. We are not to think that he saw her in the same common way as I see one of you, but he read every line of her character and history, every thought of her heart, every desire of her soul. Nobody had told him that she had been eighteen years bound, but he knew all about it,—how she came to be bound, what she had suffered during the time, how she had prayed for healing, and how the infirmity still pressed upon her. In one minute he had read her history and understood her case. He saw her; and oh, what meaning there was in his searching glance. Our Lord had wonderful eyes; all the painters in the world will never be able to produce a satisfactory picture of Christ, because they cannot copy those expressive eyes. Heaven lay calmly reposing in his eyes; they were not only bright and penetrating, but they were full of a melting power, a tenderness irresistible, a strength which secured confidence. As he looked at the poor woman I doubt not the tears started from our Lord's eyes, but they were not tears of unmingled sorrow, for he knew that he could heal her, and he anticipated the joy of doing so.

When he had gazed upon her, *he called her to him*. Did he know her name? Oh, yes, he knows all our names, and his calling is therefore personal and unmistakeable. "I have called thee by thy name," saith he, "thou art mine." See, there is the poor creature, coming up the aisle; that pitiful mass of sorrow, though bowed to the earth, is moving. Is it a woman at all? You can hardly see that she has a face, but she is coming towards him who called her. She could not stand upright, but she could come *as she was*—bent and infirm as she was. I rejoice in my Master's way of healing people, for he comes to them where they are. He does not propose to them that if they will do somewhat he will do the rest, but he begins and ends. He bids them approach him as they are, and does not ask them to mend or prepare. May my blessed Master this morning look on some of you till you feel, "The preacher means me, the preacher's Master means me," and then may there sound a voice in your ears saying, "Come to Jesus just as you are." Then may you have grace to reply—

"Just as I am—poor, wretched, blind,  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come."

When the woman came, *the great Liberator said to her, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity."* How could that be true? She was still as bent as she was before. He meant that the spell of Satan was taken off from her, that the power which had made her thus to bow herself was broken. This she believed in her inmost soul, even as Jesus said it, though as yet she was not at all different in appearance from her former state. Oh, that some of you who are God's dear people would



have power to believe this morning that the end of your gloom has come, —power to believe that your eighteen years are over, and that your time of doubt and despondency is ended. I pray that God may give you grace to know that when this morning's sun first gilded the east, light was ordained for you. Behold, I come to-day to publish the glad message from the Lord. Come forth, ye prisoners, leap ye captives, for Jesus comes to set you free to-day. The woman was liberated, but she could not actually enjoy the liberty, and I will tell you why directly. Our Lord proceeded to give her full enlargement in his own way: *he laid his hands on her*. She suffered from want of strength, and by putting his hands upon her, I conceive that the Lord poured his life into her. The warm stream of his own infinite power and vitality came into contact with the lethargic stream of her painful existence, and so quickened it that she lifted up herself. The deed of love was done: Jesus himself had done it. Beloved mourners, if we could get you away this morning from thinking about yourselves to thinking about our Lord Jesus, and from looking down upon your cares to thinking of him, what a change would come over you. If his hands could be laid upon you, those dear pierced hands which bought you, those mighty hands which rule heaven and earth on your behalf, those blessed hands which are outstretched to plead for sinners, those dear hands which will press you to his bosom for ever: if you could feel these by thinking of him, then would you soon recover your early joy, and renew the elasticity of your spirit, and the bowing down of your soul would pass away like a night dream, to be forgotten for ever. O Spirit of the Lord, make it to be so.

IV. I will not linger there, but invite you now to notice THE LOOSING OF THE BOUND. *She was made straight* we are told, and that at once. Now, what I want you to notice is this, that she must have lifted herself up—that was her own act and deed. No pressure or force was put upon her, she lifted up herself; and yet she was “*made straight*.” She was passive in so much as a miracle was wrought upon her, but she was active too, and, being enabled, she lifted up herself. What a wonderful meeting there is here of the active and the passive in the salvation of men. The Arminian says to the sinner, “Now, sinner, you are a responsible being; you must do this and that.” The Calvinist says, “Truly, sinner, you are responsible enough, but you are also unable to do anything of yourself. God must work in you both to will and to do.” What shall we do with these two teachers? They fell to fighting, a hundred years ago, most frightfully. We will not let them fight now, but what shall we do with them? We will let both speak, and believe what is true in both their testimonies. Is it true what the Arminian says, that there must be an effort on the sinner's part or he will never be saved? Unquestionably it is. As soon as ever the Lord gives spiritual life there is spiritual activity. Nobody is ever lugged into heaven by his ears, or carried there asleep on a feather bed. God deals with us as with responsible, intelligent beings. That is true, and what is the use of denying it? Now, what has the Calvinist to say? He says that the sinner is bound by the infirmity of sin, and cannot lift up himself, and when he does so, it is God that does it all, and the Lord must have all the glory of it. Is not that true too? “Oh,” says the Arminian, “I never denied that the



Lord is to have the glory. I will sing a hymn with you to the divine honour; and I will pray the same prayer with you for the divine power." All Christians are thorough Calvinists when they come to singing and praying, but it is a pity to doubt as a doctrine what we profess on our knees and in our songs. It is most true that Jesus alone saves the sinner, and equally true that the sinner believes unto salvation. The Holy Ghost never believed on behalf of anybody: a man must believe for himself and repent for himself, or be lost; but, yet there never was a grain of true faith or true repentance in this world except it was produced by the Holy Ghost. I am not going to explain these difficulties, because they are not difficulties, except in theory. They are plain facts of practical everyday life. The poor woman knew at any rate where to put the crown; she did not say, "I straightened myself," no, but she glorified God, and attributed all the work to his gracious power.

The most remarkable fact is that *she was made straight immediately*; for there was something beyond her infirmity to be overcome. Suppose that any person had been diseased of the spine, or of the nerves and muscles for eighteen years, even if the disease which occasioned his being deformed could be entirely removed, what would be the effect? Why, that the result of the disease would still remain, for the body would have become set through long continuance in one posture. You have doubtless heard of the fakirs and others in India: a man will hold his hand up for years in pursuance of a vow, but when the years of his penance are over, he cannot bring his hand down: it has become fixed and immovable. In this case the bond which held the poor bowed body was taken away, and at the same time the consequent rigidity was removed, and she in a moment stood up straight; this was a double display of miraculous power. O my poor tried friend, if the Lord will visit you this morning he will not only take away the first and greatest cause of your sadness, but the very tendency to melancholy shall depart; the long grooves which you have worn shall be smoothed, the ruts in the road of sorrow which you have worn by long continuance in sadness shall be filled up, and you shall be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

The cure being thus perfect, *up rose the woman to glorify God*. I wish I had been there; I have been wishing so all the morning. I should have liked to have seen that hypocritical ruler of the synagogue when he made his angry speech: I should have liked to have seen him when the Master silenced him so thoroughly; but especially I should have rejoiced to have seen this poor woman standing upright, and to have heard her praise the Lord. What did she say? It is not recorded, but we can well imagine. It was something like this: "I have been eighteen years in and out among you; you have seen me, and know what a poor, miserable, wretched object I was; but God has lifted me up all in a moment. Blessed be his name, I have been made straight." What she spoke with her mouth was not half of what she expressed. No reporter could have taken it down; she spoke with her eyes, she spoke with her hands, she spoke with every limb of her body. I suppose she moved about to see if she was really straight, and to make sure that it was not all a delusion. She must have been all over a living mass of pleasure, and by every movement she praised God from the sole of the



foot to the crown of the head. Never was there a more eloquent woman in the universe. She was like one new-born, delivered from a long death, joyous with all the novelty of a fresh life. Well might she glorify God.

She made no mistake as to how the cure was wrought; she traced it to a divine power, and that divine power she extolled. Brother, sister, cannot you glorify Christ this morning that he has set you free? Though bound so long you need not be bound any longer. Christ is able to deliver you. Trust him, believe him, be made straight, and then go and tell your kinsfolk and acquaintances, "You knew how depressed I was, for you cheered me in my sorrow as best you could, but now I have to tell you what the Lord has done for my soul."

V. Fifthly, let us reflect upon OUR REASON FOR EXPECTING THE LORD JESUS TO DO THE SAME THING TO-DAY as he did eighteen hundred years and more ago. What was his reason for setting this woman free? According to his own statement it was, first of all, *human kindness*. He says, "When you have your ox, or your ass tied up, and you see that it is thirsty, you untie the knot, and lead the poor creature away down to the river, or the tank, to water. None of you would leave an ox tied up to famish." This is good reasoning, and leads us to believe that Jesus will help sorrowing ones. Tried soul, wouldst thou not loose an ox or an ass if thou sawest it suffering? "Ay," sayest thou. And dost thou think the Lord wilt not loose thee? Hast thou more bowels of mercy than the Christ of God? Come, come, think not so meanly of my Master. If thy heart would lead thee to pity an ass, dost thou think his heart will not lead him to pity thee? He has not forgotten thee: he remembers thee still. His tender humanity moves him to set thee free.

More than that, there was *special relationship*. He tells this master of the synagogue that a man would loose *his* ox or *his* ass. Perhaps he might not think it his business to go and loose that which belonged to another man, but it is his own ass, his own ox, and he will loose him. And dost thou think, dear heart, that the Lord Jesus will not loose thee? He bought thee with his blood, his Father gave thee to him, he has loved thee with an everlasting love: will he not loose thee? Thou art his property. Dost thou not know that he sweeps his house to find his lost groat, that he runs over hill and dale to find his lost sheep? And will he not come and loose his poor tied-up ox or ass? Will he not liberate his captive daughter? Assuredly he will. Art thou a daughter of Abraham, a child of faith, and will he not set thee free? Depend upon it he will.

Next, there was a *point of antagonism* which moved the Saviour to act promptly. He says, "This woman being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound." Now, if I knew the devil had tied anything up I am sure I would try to unloose it, would not you? We may be sure some mischief is brewing when the devil is working, and, therefore, it must be a good deed to undo his work. But Jesus Christ came into the world on purpose to destroy the works of the devil; and so when he saw the woman like a tied-up ox he said, "I will unloose her if for nothing else that I may undo what the devil has done." Now, dear tried friend, inasmuch as thy sorrow may be traced to Satanic influence, Jesus Christ



will prove in thy case more than a match for the devil, and he will set thee free.

Then think of *her sorrowful condition*. An ox or an ass tied up to the manger without water would soon be in a very sad plight. Pity it, poor thing. Hear the lowing of the ox, as hour after hour its thirst tells upon it. Would you not pity it? And do you think the Lord does not pity his poor, tried, tempted, afflicted children? Those tears, shall they fall for nothing? Those sleepless nights, shall they be disregarded? That broken heart which fain would but cannot believe the promise, shall that for ever be denied a hearing? Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up the bowels of his mercy? Ah, no, he will remember thy sorrowful estate and hear thy groanings, for he puts thy tears into his bottle.

Last of all, there was this reason to move the heart of Christ, that *she had been eighteen years in that state*. "Then," said he, "she shall be loosed at once." The master of the synagogue would have said, "She has been eighteen years bound, and she may well wait till to-morrow, for it is only one day." "Nay," saith Christ, "if she has been bound eighteen years, she shall not wait a minute; she has had too much of it already; she shall be set free at once." Do not, therefore, argue from the length of your despondency that it shall not come to an end, but rather argue from it that release is near. The night has been so long, it must be so much nearer the dawning. You have been scourged so long that it must be so much nearer the last stroke, for the Lord doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Therefore take heart and be of a good courage. Oh, that my divine Master would now come and do what I fain would do but cannot, namely, make every child of God here leap for joy.

I know what this being bound by Satan means. The devil has not tied me up for eighteen years at a stretch, and I do not think he ever will, but he has brought me into sad bondage many a time. Still, my Master comes and sets me free, and leads me out to watering: and what a drink I get at such times! I seem as if I could drink up Jordan at a draught when I get to his promises, and quaff my fill of his sweet love. I know by this that he will lead other poor souls out to the watering; and when he does so to any of you I pray you drink like an ox. You may be tied up again; therefore drink as much as you can of his grace, and rejoice while you may. Eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight in fatness. Be glad in the Lord, ye righteous, and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart, for the Lord looses the prisoners. May he loose many now. Amen.

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PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxx.;  
Luke xiii. 1—17.

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HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—258, 40, 607.