

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A LIFT FOR THE PROSTRATE.

A Sermon

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“And he (that is, Jesus) came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.”—Mark i. 31.

PETER'S wife's mother was sick of a very terrible fever. It was no ordinary one, such as, we are told, is common in the district where she lived; but “Luke, the beloved physician,” as Paul calls the evangelist, tells us that “Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever.” You know that it is the nature of fever to leave the patient prostrate even when the disease itself departs; but Jesus Christ not only intended to heal Peter's wife's mother, and to heal her at once, but he also meant that she should be so completely cured that she should have no lingering prostration. Christ's cures are always perfect cures; not partial ones. He does not cause the fever to go, and permit the prostration to remain; but he takes away both the fever and the prostration.

It is possible that the poor patient had almost given up all hope of recovery; and, probably, those who were round about her would also have despaired if they had not had faith in the great Physician, the Lord Jesus Christ. It was, therefore, for her encouragement, and for theirs also, that our Lord bent over the bed whereon the fevered woman lay, took her by the hand, thus cheering her by showing that he was not afraid to come into contact with her, and then gently lifted her up; and she, yielding to the kindly pressure, rose, and sat up,—nay, not merely sat up, but left the bed, being so perfectly restored that she began at once to minister to them as the housewife whose duty it was to care for their comfort.

I hope that there are many in this congregation whom Jesus Christ means to bless; but they are, at present, in a state of utter prostration; they are so despondent that their spirits sink almost to the point of despair. They cannot believe that there is mercy for them; they have relinquished all hope of that. They did, at one time, have some measure of hope, but it is all gone now.

They are in the prostrate condition of Peter's mother-in-law, and they need Christ to do for them the two things which he did for her. First, *he came into contact with her*; and, secondly, *he gently lifted her up, and completely restored her*. May he do the like for you!

I. Our first concern, in looking after prostrate souls, is to tell them that **JESUS CHRIST COMES INTO CONTACT WITH THEM**.

You think, my poor distressed friend, that Jesus Christ will have nothing to do with you. You have read and heard about him, but he seems to you to be a long way off, and you cannot reach him; neither does it seem at all probable to you that he will ever come your way, and look in pity upon you. Now, listen.

In the first place, *Jesus Christ has come into contact with you*, for you are a member of the human race, of which Jesus Christ also became a member by his incarnation. Never forget that, while it is perfectly true that Christ "is over all, God blessed for ever," yet it is equally true that he deigned to be born into this world, as the infant of an earthly mother, and that he condescended to live here under the same conditions as the rest of us, suffering the same weakness, and sickness, and sorrow, and death as we do, for our sakes. Never think of Jesus, I pray you, as though he were only a spirit, at whose presence you have cause to be alarmed; but think of him as a man like yourselves, eating and drinking as others did,—not a recluse, shutting himself away from sinners, but living as a man among men, the perfect specimen of manhood, the man Christ Jesus, for thus he has come near to you. You would not be afraid to speak to one of your fellow-men; then, do not be afraid to speak to Jesus. Tell him all the details of your case, for he was never a man of a proud and haughty spirit. He was not one who said, "Stand by, for I am holier than thou;" but he was a man with a great heart of love. He was so full of attractiveness that even children came and clustered around his feet, and when his disciples would have driven them away, he said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." He never repelled even the very worst of mankind when they approached him; but he longed to gather them to himself. He wept over the guilty city of Jerusalem, and said, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Come, then, distressed spirit, and see, in the very fact that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, that he has come near to you, and laid his hand upon you.

"Ah!" you say, "I can comprehend that he has come near to men; but, then, I am not merely a man, but a sinful man." Yes, and *Jesus has come near to sinful men*, and his name is called Jesus because he is the Saviour from sin. His work in this world was not to seek saints, but "to seek and to save that which was lost." My Master's errand was not to the good, the excellent, the righteous, but to the evil, the unholy, the unrighteous. He said, "They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." If he did not come to save sinners, why did he come as a sacrifice?

Sacrifice is only required where there is sin,—an atonement is only needed where there is guilt. Christ comes to you, a guilty sinner, and he lays his hand upon you, even as he laid it upon Peter's wife's mother when she was sick of that great fever.

Do I hear you say, as in a whisper, as if you were afraid that anyone else should hear you, that you are not only a sinner, but a great sinner,—that you have sinned beyond the ordinary guilt of the common mass of mankind,—that there are some points in which the crimson of your guilt is of a deeper dye than that of any other man? My friend, let me assure you that *Jesus Christ came to save the chief of sinners*. Do you see him, on the cross, enduring those indescribable pangs of death? Can you hear his death-cries, and that soul-piercing shriek, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and still think that such a death as that was on behalf of little sinners' trifling offences, mere peccadilloes or mistakes? Ah, no! the Son of God came to give his life a ransom for many great sins, and many great sinners. The grandeur of the atonement of Christ is a proof that its object was the removal of sin, however great that sin may be. The Son of God is himself the Saviour of sinners; there must, therefore, be a colossal greatness about sin to need the Son of God to remove it, and to need that the Son of God should die ere the more than Herculean labour of putting sin away could be performed; but, having put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, he is now able to save even the greatest of sinners.

That Jesus has come into contact with great sinners, is very clear; for, as you read the record of his life, you see that *his preaching was constantly aimed at just such characters*. If you take a survey of his usual congregations, you will discover that they were largely made up of such characters. The Pharisees said, with contempt, but no doubt with truth, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Just at that very time, we have the record, "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him." His preaching evidently attracted them, and he never seems to have been surprised that it did, nor to have expressed his disgust that he should have drawn around him such a low and degraded class of hearers. No; but, on the contrary, he said that he was sent to seek lost sheep till he found them, and to welcome the wandering prodigal when he came back to his Father's house. Our Lord Jesus Christ, from the character of his congregation and the tone of his preaching, evidently came to this world on purpose to come into contact with the very worst of sinners. I want you to realize, dear friend, that my Lord Jesus Christ is a man, and that he is not a man who has come to look for congenial companions who might be worthy to be numbered amongst his acquaintances; but he has come to look after uncongenial men and women to whom he may bring the blessings of salvation. He has come, not to be ministered unto, but to minister;—not to receive, but to bestow boons; his object in being here, in this world, is not to pick out, here and there, a noble and notable character; but to seek after souls that need his grace, and to come to them, and bless and save

them. So he has, in this respect, come near to you. Remember that commission of his, which he gave to his disciples a little while before he went back to heaven: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." On another occasion, after his resurrection, he reminded them "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem;" that is, beginning at the very place where the people lived who had crucified him. "Begin where they live who have stained their hands with my blood. Begin with them, and then go to every other creature in the whole world, and say to sinners in every part of the globe, 'Whosoever believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life.'" In giving that commission, our Lord Jesus Christ reached his hand across the centuries that he might touch you, and I have come here to obey his commission by preaching the gospel to you, for you are included in the term, "every creature." So Jesus Christ comes into contact with you through the preaching of his Word at this very moment.

There is one solemn thought that I should like you to think of, it is this,—having entered this house of prayer, and having heard the gospel, as you will have done before this service is over, *the Lord Jesus Christ has so come into contact with you that you will never lose the impress of that contact, whether you are lost or saved.* If you are lost, you will have the additional guilt of having rejected him; neither can you ever clear yourself of that guilt, do what you may. Your ears have heard the Word, so that, if you do not receive it, you will be numbered amongst those to whom the gospel came, but who judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life, like some of those to whom the apostle Paul preached; and, therefore, it shall condemn you. For, to everybody who hears the gospel, there is a savour in it; to some, it is a savour of death unto death, and to others a savour of life unto life. There is not a man, woman, or child, who has understanding enough to know what we mean by preaching the gospel, who will be able to go out of this house of prayer without receiving some token of contact with the Lord Jesus Christ. Either his blood will be upon you to save you, or else there will be realized in you that dreadful curse which the Jews invoked upon themselves, "His blood be on us, and on our children," which abides upon them as a curse unto this day. You shall either be cleansed from guilt by the blood of Jesus, or else you shall be guilty of rejecting him, and so putting yourselves in the same category as the Jews who rejected him, and who nailed him to the accursed tree. One way or other, be ye sure of this, "The kingdom of God is come unto you." It is a solemn fact to have to state this, but so it is. Jesus Christ has, in some way or other, put his hand upon you, and he is now in contact with you.

II. Leaving that point, however, I feel joy in passing on to the next one. When Jesus grasped the hand of Peter's wife's mother, HE THEN BEGAN GENTLY TO LIFT HER UP. She, willingly enough, responded to his touch; and, by at once recommencing her household duties, proved that she was perfectly healed.

Now, there are some poor, prostrate, desponding souls, who need somebody to give them a lift; and I would that the Lord, even while I am preaching, might take some of you by the hand, and lift you up. My object will be to mention a few things which may help to give you a lift. You want to be saved; you long to be saved; but you fear that you never will be, and it is that very fear which keeps you from being saved. If you could but hope, your hope would be realized; but you do not feel as if you dared even to hope. Now, give me your hand, and let me try to give you a lift.

First, *remember that others, who were very like what you now are, have been saved.* Do you not know some people who used to be very much in the condition in which you are at the present moment? If you do not, then find out the nearest Christian friend amongst your acquaintance, tell him what you regard as the peculiarity of your condition, and I feel almost certain that he will say to you, "Why, that is not anything peculiar; that is just how I was before I found the Saviour." If you do not find it so with the first Christian person whom you meet, you ought not to be surprised, because, of course, all Christians are not alike; but I feel sure that you will not have talked to many Christian people before you will find that what you consider to be very remarkable peculiarities in yourself will turn out to have been very common, for a great many other people have been in just the same state. I challenge you, who are very despondent, to see whether you cannot find some, who once were as you now are, who have been saved; and when you do find them, the reasoning is very clear. If A be saved, and B is like A, then why should not B also be saved?

"Ah!" say you, "I have very few Christian acquaintances of whom I can make enquiry." Very well, then, I will give you another simple test. *Take your Bible, and look out the cases of conversion, and see whether the saved ones were not very much like you now are;* and if that should not satisfy you, turn to the various promises that the Lord Jesus has made to coming sinners, and see whether there is not one that is suited to such a sinner as you are. I think that you cannot go far in an honest examination of the promises of the gospel without saying, "Well, now, it really does look as if I could squeeze in there, at any rate; I think that description just exactly meets my case." I should not be surprised if you meet with some text, of which you will say, "Why, that looks as if it had been written entirely for me; it is such an accurate description of my forlorn condition." Well, then, if you find that Christ has invited such sinners as you are, and that, according to the inspired record, he has saved such as you are, why should not you also have hope? Have you been a thief? Remember that—

"The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may you, though vile as he,
Wash all your sins away."

Have you been a sinner in a more immodest sense? Remember that there was a woman, who was "a sinner" in that very sense, who washed Christ's feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Have you been a swearer? I should think that Simon Peter had been a great swearer before he was converted, or else he would not have used oaths and curses so freely when he denied his Master. Yet, in spite of that old habit breaking out again, Simon Peter was not only saved, but he became one of the most useful servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. I might continue to mention all sorts of sinners, and say to you, "Such an one as you now are has been saved, and has gone to heaven; is not that a lift for you? I pray the Lord to make it so. Others like you have been saved, so why should not you also be saved? Wherefore, be of good courage, poor prostrate sinner."

Let me give you another lift. *Salvation is all of grace*; that is to say, it is altogether of God's free favour. God does not save any man because there is anything in him that deserves salvation. The Lord saves whomsoever he wills to save; this is one of his grand prerogatives, of which he is very tenacious. His own declaration is, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion;" and Paul's conclusion from that declaration is, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Well, now, if it be God's will to bestow his mercy upon sinners, according to his own sovereign grace in Christ Jesus, irrespective of anything good in them, why should he not show mercy to you? You have been looking for some reason in yourself why he should show mercy unto you, but you cannot find any such reason; and I can tell you that there never was any reason in sinners themselves why God should save them. He has always saved them for reasons known only to himself, which he has never revealed, and which he tells us he will not reveal. He asks, like the householder in the parable, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" and so he will do. No man has any right to salvation. We have all forfeited all claim of merit; so, when the Lord gives his mercy, he gives it wherever he pleases. Why, then, should he not give it to you as well as to anybody else?

I may also remind you that *faith in Jesus Christ always does save the soul*,—simply trusting him, as we were singing just now,—

"Only trust him! Only trust him!

Only trust him now!

He will save you! He will save you!

He will save you now!"

There have been a great many who have put this to the test, and they have found that faith in Christ has saved them. There are some people, nowadays, who tell us that this is immoral doctrine; they say that we ought to preach up good works. We do preach up good works, in the most forcible manner; for we say that faith in Jesus Christ prevents men from living in sin. We do not preach good works as a ground of salvation. That would be as foolish as

children, who take flowers, and stick them in the ground, and say, "Oh, what a beautiful garden we have got!" We plant the seeds of the flowers, or the roots of the flowers of grace; for faith in Jesus Christ is the seed and the root of virtue, and he that believes in Jesus Christ is saved, not merely from the punishment of sin, but from the sin itself,—from the power of sin, from the habit of sin. If it be still said that this is immoral doctrine, let the thousands of men, who have been saved from drunkenness, and lasciviousness, and profanity, by simply believing in Jesus, rise up, and enter their solemn protest against the wicked charge that there is anything immoral in this teaching. Immoral doctrine? Why, it has brought millions to Christ, and millions to heaven. If this doctrine could truly be called immoral, then God himself might be charged with being immoral, for this gospel assuredly came from him, and it is nothing short of blasphemy to call it immoral. Hear this gospel, sinner. You have no good works, and you will never have any until you repent of sin, and trust the Lord Jesus Christ. If you try to have any, they will all break down, because the motive at the back of those supposed good works will be this; you will do them in the hope of thereby saving yourself. What is that but sheer selfishness,—dead selfishness, which cannot be acceptable with God? But, sirs, if you will only trust the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall receive the immediate pardon of your sin, and with that pardon will come heartfelt gratitude to him who gives you the pardon; and with that gratitude will come intense hatred of everything that he hates, and fervent love of everything that he loves. And then you will do good works; but from what motive? Why, out of gratitude to him; and not being the result of selfishness, they will really be good works, for they will be done with the view of pleasing God, and not as a means of getting something for yourself.

Every soul, then, that has believed in Jesus has found everlasting life, and deliverance from sin. Very well, then, you also will find the same blessings if you now confide wholly in him. They did "only trust him," do you the same,—"only trust him now." They dropped into the arms of Christ, he caught them, and held them fast. Do you the same; drop now into the arms of Christ, who stands beneath you, ready to catch you, and you shall most certainly be saved. This is Christ's own declaration, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The belief is to come first, and the baptism is to follow as the confession of the belief. Christ commanded his disciples to observe that order: "Go ye therefore, and teach (or, make disciples of) all nations, baptizing them (those who are made disciples,) into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." This is what Christ himself said; so, if you have believed in him, and have been baptized on profession of that faith, you are saved, just as myriads of others have been saved. I have thus tried to give you a further lift up, and I pray the Lord Jesus to take you by the hand, and lift you up, you fevered and prostrate patients, who cannot rise without his power being poured into you.

Let me try to give you a lift in another way. I think I hear you say, "O sir, I know the gospel; but, somehow, I cannot get hold of it. I know what praying means, but I cannot pray as I would. I know what repenting is, but I cannot repent as I would." Here is a text which will, I hope, give you a lift: "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities." Can you not look up to heaven, and ask that blessed Spirit to help you now? What though your heart is hard as the nether millstone? The Spirit of God can make it soft in a moment. What though it seems impossible for you to believe in Jesus? The gracious Spirit is ready now to enable you to believe in him. What if now you seem to be the very reverse of what you ought to be? The blessed Spirit can completely change your nature. He can open the blind eye, and unstop the deaf ear, and take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. I know that you cannot help yourself; but I also know that the Holy Spirit can help you, for nothing is impossible unto him. Come, heavenly wind, and breathe upon these dry bones; quicken them into life and activity, so that, where there was nothing but death, there may be a living army to serve the living Lord! And, blessed be his holy name, he will do it; for, wherever there is a true, heart-felt prayer for his presence, he is present already, dictating that prayer; for no one really prays until the Holy Spirit teaches him how to pray. So, you who are like Peter's wife's mother, have we been able to lift you up yet? May the Lord's almighty hand be stretched out to you, for ours alone will be too weak to lift you up.

Here is another lift for you. Notwithstanding all that I have said, you still think that you deserve to be lost, and that you must be lost, for *your being punished will show the justice of God*. That is true, as far as it goes; but let me tell you something else that is equally true. *Your being saved will glorify the mercy of God*, and "he delighteth in mercy." I recollect the time when I thought that, if Jesus Christ saved me, it would be the biggest thing he ever did. I thought so then, and I do not know but that I think so now; and I feel sure that, when I get to heaven, I shall still have that idea. And if you, dear friend, think the same concerning yourself, I expect you are about right. Jesus Christ, however, loves to do big things; he delights to show great mercy to great sinners; and if there is one man here, who seems not to have any good point about him, but whom everybody knows as being a renowned sinner,—well, I pray the Lord to save you, my friend, because then the devils in hell will hear of it, and they will be angry, and I like them to be angry for such a reason as that; and the wicked men, with whom you have been accustomed to associate, will hear of it, and they will say, "What! old Jack become a Christian? Harry turned Baptist? I never would have believed such a thing to be possible." We like to have just such converts as these, and my Lord likes to have them too, for such victories of sovereign grace cause a great stir in the camp of the Philistines, and they begin to tremble, and cry, "Who will be the next to turn?" And so the kingdom of heaven grows, and Satan's

fame gets dimmed, and the fame of Jesus of Nazareth grows brighter and brighter.

"Ah!" says one, "I never looked at it in that light; for, certainly, if Jesus Christ were to save me, I should be the biggest wonder on earth." Then I think it is very likely that he will save you, for he delights to do great wonders, and to work mighty marvels. How do you think that a doctor gets to have great fame? There are some physicians in London, who have so many patients waiting to see them, that the poor sufferers have to wait hour after hour before they can get in. How did those doctors get to be so celebrated? If I were to tell you they got all their fame through curing chapped hands, and sore fingers, and warts, you would say, "Nonsense! Nobody gets fame through doing such little things as that." How did they get their honour, then? Oh, there was a poor man, who was nigh unto death; he had been given up by several other doctors, but this one was enabled by God to heal him. Or there was a man, whose leg was about to be amputated, and this doctor said, "I will save that man's limb." Or there was a complicated case of internal disease, and this doctor said, "I understand that case," and he cured it, and everybody talked about the wonderful cure; and, now, everybody goes to that doctor. He became famous through curing bad cases; one really bad case brought him more credit than fifty minor maladies might have done. So is it with the great Physician and you big sinners with such a complication of disorders that nobody but Christ can cure you. My Lord and Master has a wondrous way of healing those who appear to be incurable; and when he cures such cases as yours, heaven and earth and hell hear of it, and it makes him famous. So I would encourage you to hope that he will save even you, though you are as prostrate as Peter's wife's mother was before Christ took her by the hand, and lifted her up. May my gracious Lord and Master help you to take encouragement from what he has done for others who were in as sad a state as you are now in!

Though your case seems so hopeless to you, or, if you have any hope of recovery, you feel that it will take a long while, I want to remind you that *Jesus Christ pardons sinners in an instant*. A man is as black as midnight one moment, and as bright as noonday the next. Jesus Christ lifted up upon the cross has such mighty power that, if a man had all the sins of mankind resting upon him, yet, if he did but look to Christ by faith, his sins would be all gone in a moment. Did you ever see that wonderful sculpture which represents the Laocoon and his sons with the monstrous snakes twisted all about their limbs? Well, though you should be another Laocoon, and sinful habits should be twisted all about you, so that it would be impossible for you to free yourself from them, yet, if you look to Jesus by faith, these monsters shall drop dead at your feet. Jesus Christ, the Seed of the woman, sets his foot upon the monster, Sin, and breaks its head; and if you believe in Jesus, that pierced foot of his shall crush the life out of your sin, and you shall be delivered from its power. Oh, that you might have grace to trust in Jesus for instantaneous pardon,

instantaneous regeneration, instantaneous deliverance from nature's darkness into God's most marvellous light! If you are as prostrate as Peter's wife's mother was, you ought not to lie still any longer when Christ is ready to give you such a lift as that.

But if you do, I bid you remember, poor desponding, despairing sinner, that *he who has come to save such as you are is a Divine Saviour*. What a death-blow this ought to be to every doubt! You say that there is a difficulty in your case. Yes, there is always a difficulty where there is only finite power; there always will be difficulties where there are creatures with limited capacities; but here is the Creator,—the Creator in human flesh,—he who made the heavens and the earth has come down to live here as a man, and to die upon the cross, in order that he may save sinners. What difficulty can there be in the presence of Omnipotence? Talk not of difficulty in the presence of the almighty God. He has but to will anything, and it is done;—to speak, and it stands fast for ever. Jesus Christ, my Lord and Master, is able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by him, and he is able to save them with the greatest possible ease. What an easy thing it was for Christ to bless men, and women, and children when he was here upon earth! A poor woman came in the crowd, and just touched the hem of his garment,—she could not get near enough to touch him; but she just touched the hem of his garment with her finger,—there was contact between her and Christ through her finger and the hem of his garment, and she was made whole that very instant. There were other cases in which Christ healed people who were miles away from him at the time. "Go thy way," said he to the nobleman, "thy son liveth." He had not been near him; he could work the miracle just as easily at a distance. O sinner, nothing is impossible with God. If you are sick, and nigh unto death, Jesus Christ is able to save you. If I saw you at the very gates of hell,—so long as you had not actually crossed the threshold,—if I saw you trembling there, and you said to me, "Can Jesus Christ save me now?" I would reply, "Ay, my brother, look unto him, and he will take you from the gates of hell to the gates of heaven in a single moment." He said when on earth, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men," and it is just as true to-day. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

"Only trust him! Only trust him!

Only trust him now!

He will save you! He will save you!

He will save you now!"

Oh, that he would bless this word to you! Christ is God as well as man. He suffered in the stead of sinners on the cross, but he lives after the suffering has been accomplished, he lives as the Saviour who is mighty to save; and whoever will take him as his or her own Saviour shall find it to be so this very hour.