

LOOSING THE SHOE-LATCHET

NO. 1044

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 31, 1872
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“One mightier than I cometh,
the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.”*
Luke 3:16

IT was not John's business to attract followers to himself but to point them to Jesus, and he very faithfully discharged his commission. His opinion of his Master, of whom he was the herald, was a very high one. He revered Him as the anointed of the Lord, the King of Israel, and consequently, he was not tempted into elevating himself into a rival. He rejoiced to declare “He must increase but I must decrease.”

In the course of his self-depreciation, he uses the expression of our text, which is recorded by each one of the evangelists, with some little variation. Matthew words it, “whose shoes I am not worthy to bear,” he was not fit to fetch his Lord His shoes. Mark writes it “whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose,” and John has it very much as in Luke.

This putting on, and taking off and putting away of sandals, was an office usually left to menial servants, it was not a work of any repute or honor, yet the Baptist felt that it would be a great honor to be even a menial servant of the Lord Jesus. He felt that the Son of God was so infinitely superior to himself that he was honored if only permitted to be the lowest slave in His employ. He would not allow men to attempt comparisons between himself and Jesus, he felt that none could, for a moment, be allowed.

Now this honest estimate of himself as less than nothing in comparison with his Master is greatly to be imitated by us. John is to be commended and admired for this, but better still he is to be carefully copied.

Remember that John was by no means an inferior man. Among all that had been born of women before his time there had not been a greater than he. He was the subject of many prophecies, and his office was a peculiarly noble one. He was the friend of the great Bridegroom, and introduced Him to His chosen bride. He was the morning star of the Gospel day, but he counted himself no light in the presence of the Sun of Righteousness whom he heralded.

The temperament of John was not that which bowed or cringed, he was no reed shaken by the wind, no man of courtly habits fitted for a king's palace. No. We see in him an Elijah, a man of iron, a son of thunder. He roared like a young lion on his prey, and feared the face of none.

Some men are so naturally meek spirited, not to say weak-minded, that they naturally become subservient and set up others as their leaders, such men are apt to err in depreciating themselves. But John was every inch a man, his great soul bowed only before that which was worthy of homage. He was in God's strength as an iron pillar and a brazen wall, a hero for the cause of the Lord and yet he sat down in the presence of Jesus as a little child at school sits at his master's feet, and he cried “whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to stoop down and to unloose.”

Recollect, moreover, that John was a man endowed with great abilities, and these are very apt to make a man proud. He was a prophet, yea, and more than a prophet. When he stood in the wilderness to preach, his burning eloquence soon attracted the people from Jerusalem and from all the cities round about, and the banks of Jordan saw a vast multitude of eager hearers crowding around the man clothed with a garment of camel's hair.

Thousands gathered together to listen to the teaching of one who had not been brought up at the feet of the rabbis, neither had been taught eloquence after the fashion of the schools. John was a man of bold, plain, telling, commanding speech. He was no second-rate teacher, but a master in Israel, yet he assumed no airs of self-conceit, but accounted the lowest place in the Lord's service as too high for him.

Note too, that he was not only a great preacher, but he had been very successful not only in attracting the crowds but in baptizing them. The whole nation felt the effects of John's ministry, and knew that he was a prophet: they were swayed to and fro by his zealous words, as the corn of autumn is moved in the breath of the wind.

A man is very apt, when he feels that he has power over masses of his fellow creatures to be lifted up and exalted above measure, but not so John. It was safe for the Lord to trust him with a great popularity and a great success, for though he had all those honors he laid them meekly down at Jesus' feet and said, "I am not worthy to be even the lowest slave in Messiah's household."

Reflect also, moreover, that John was a religious leader, and he had the opportunity, if he had pleased, of becoming the leader of a powerful sect. The people were evidently willing to follow him. There were some, no doubt, who would not have gone over to Christ Himself if John had not bidden them go, and testified, "Behold the Lamb of God," and confessed over and over again, saying, "I am not the Christ."

We read of some, who years after the Baptist was dead still remained his disciples, so that he had the opportunity of leading away a multitude who would have become his followers, and so of setting up his own name among men. But he scorned it, his elevated view of his Master prevented his entertaining any desire for personal leadership, and putting himself down not in the place of a captain of the Lord's hosts, but as one of the least soldiers in the army, he saith, "His shoe-latchets I am not worthy to unloose."

What was the reason, think you, of John's always retaining his proper position? Was it not because he had a high idea of his Master, and a deep reverence for Him?

Ah, brethren, because of our little estimate of Christ, it is often unsafe for the Lord to trust us in any but the very lowest positions. I believe many of us might have been ten times as useful, only it would not have been safe for God to have allowed us to be so. We should have been puffed up, and like Nebuchadnezzar we should have boasted, "Behold this great Babylon that I have builded."

Many a man has had to fight in the back ranks, and serve his Master but little, and enjoy but little success in that service because he did not reverence Christ enough, did not love his Lord enough, and consequently, self would soon have crept in to his own overturning, to the grief of the church, and to the dishonor of his Lord.

Oh, for high thoughts of Christ, and low thoughts of ourselves! Oh, to see Jesus as filling all in all, and to be ourselves as less than nothing before Him.

Having thus introduced the subject, our object this morning is to draw instruction from the expression which John here and elsewhere used with regard to himself and his Lord, "Whose shoe-latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

I gather from this, first, that *no form of holy service is to be lightly set by*. Secondly, that *our unworthiness is apparent in the presence of any sort of holy work*, but that, thirdly, *this unworthiness of ours, when most felt, should rather stimulate us to action than discourage us*, for so it doubtless operated in the case of John the Baptist.

I. First then, note that NO FORM OF HOLY SERVICE IS TO BE LIGHTLY SET BY.

To unloose the latches of Christ's shoes might seem very trivial, it might even seem as if it involved the loss of self-respect for a man of position and influence to stoop to offices which a servant might quite as well perform. Why should I bring myself down to that? I will learn of Christ. I will distribute bread among the multitude for Christ. I will have my boat by the sea shore ready for Christ to preach in, or I will go and fetch the ass upon which He shall ride in triumph into Jerusalem: but what need can there be for the disciple to become a mere menial?

Such a question as that is here forever silenced, and the spirit which dictates it is practically rebuked. Nothing is dishonorable by which Jesus may be honored. Nothing lowers a man if thereby he honors his Lord. It is not possible for any godly work to be beneath our dignity, rather ought we to know that the lowest grade of service bestows dignity upon the man who heartily performs it. Even the least and most obscure form of serving Christ is more high and lofty than we are worthy to undertake.

Now, note that little works for Christ, little shoe bearings and latchet loosings, often *have more of the child's spirit in them than greater works*. Outside, in the streets, a man's companion will do him a kindness, and the action performed is friendly, but for filial acts you must look inside the house.

There the child does not lend money to its father, or negotiate business, yet in his little acts there is more than sonship. Who is it that comes to meet Father when the day is over? and what is the action which often indicates childhood's love? See the little child comes tottering forward with father's slippers, and runs off with his boots as he puts them off.

The service is little, but it is loving and filial, and has more of filial affection in it than the servant's bringing in the meal, of preparing the bed, or any other more essential service. It gives the little one great pleasure, and expresses his love. No one who is not my child, or who does not love me in something like the same way, would ever dream of making such a service his specialty. The littleness of the act fits it to the child's capacity, and there is also something in it which makes it a suitable expression of a child's affection.

So also in little acts for Jesus. Oftentimes men of the world will give their money to the cause of Christ, putting down large sums for charity or for missions, but they will not weep in secret over other men's sins, or speak a word of comfort to an afflicted saint. To visit a poor sick woman, teach a little child, reclaim a street Arab, breathe a prayer for enemies, or whisper a promise in the ear of a desponding saint, may show more of sonship than building a row of almshouses or endowing a church.

In little acts for Christ it is always to be remembered that the *little things are as necessary to be done as the greater acts*. If Christ's feet be not washed, if His sandals be not unloosed He may suffer, and His feet may be lamed, so that a journey may be shortened, and many villages may miss the blessing of His presence. So with other minor things. There is as much need for the quiet intercessions of saints as for the public delivery of God's truth before the assembled thousands. It is as needful that babes be taught their little hymns as that monarchs be rebuked for sin.

We remember the old story of the losing of the battle through the missing of a single nail in a horseshoe, and preadventure up to this moment the church may have lost her battle for Christ because some minor work which ought to have been done for Jesus has been neglected. I should not wonder if it should turn out that many churches have been without prosperity because, while they have looked to the public ministry and the visible ordinances, they have been negligent of smaller usefulness's.

Many a cart comes to grief through inattention to the linchpin. A very small matter turns an arrow aside from the target. To teach a child to sing "Gentle Jesus," and to point its young heart to the Redeemer, may seem a trifle, but yet it may be a most essential part of the process of that gracious work of religious education by which that child shall afterwards become a believer, a minister, and a winner of souls. Omit that first lesson and it may be you have turned aside a life.

Take another instance. A preacher once found himself advertised to preach in an obscure village, the storm was terrible, and therefore, though he kept his appointment, he found only one person present in the place of meeting. He preached a sermon to that one hearer with as much earnestness as if the house had been crowded. Years after he found churches all over the district, and he discovered that his audience of one had been converted on that day, and had become the evangelist of the whole region. Had he declined to preach to one, what blessings might have been withheld.

Brethren, never neglect the loosing of the shoe-latchet for Christ, since you do not know what may hang upon it. Human destiny often turns upon a hinge so small as to be invisible. Never say within yourself, "This is trivial"—nothing is trivial for the Lord. Never say, "But this surely might be omitted without much loss." How know you? If it be your duty, He who allotted you your task knew what He

did. Do not you in any measure neglect any portion of His orders, for in all His commands there is consummate wisdom, and on your part it will be wisdom to obey them, even to the jots and tittles.

Little things for Christ again *are often the best tests of the truth of our religion*. Obedience in little things has much to do with the character of a servant. You engage a servant in your own house, and you know very well whether she be a good or bad servant that the main duties of the day are pretty sure to be attended to.

The meals will be cooked, the beds will be prepared, the house will be swept, the door will be answered, but the difference between a servant who makes the house happy and another who is its plague, lies in a number of small matters, which, preadventure, you could not put down on paper, but which make up a very great deal of domestic comfort or discomfort and so determine the value of a servant.

So I believe it is in Christian life. I do not suppose that the most of us here would ever omit the weightier matters of the law, as Christian men we endeavor to maintain integrity and uprightness in our actions and we try to order our households in the fear of God in great matters. But it is in the looking to the Lord upon minor details that the spirit of obedience is most displayed. It is seen in our keeping our eye up to the Lord, as the eyes of the handmaidens are to their mistresses for daily orders about this step and that transaction.

The really obedient spirit wishes to know the Lord's will about everything, and if there be any point which to the world seem trifling, for that very reason the obedient spirit says, "I will attend to it to prove to my Lord that even in the minutiae I desire to submit my soul to His good pleasure."

In small things lie the crucibles and the touchstones. Any hypocrite will come to the Sabbath worship, but it is not every hypocrite that will attend prayer meetings, or read the Bible in secret, or speak privately of the things of God to the saints. These are less things, so they judge, and therefore they neglect them, and so condemn themselves. Where there is deep religion prayer is loved, where religion is shallow only public acts of worship are cared for.

You shall find the same true in other things. A man who is no Christian will very likely not tell you a downright lie by saying that black is white, but he will not hesitate to declare that whitey-brown is white—he will go that length.

Now, the Christian will not go halfway to falsehood, nay, he scorns to go an inch on that road. He will no more cheat you out of two pence farthing, than he would out of two thousand pounds. He will not rob you of an inch any more than of an ell. It is in the little that the genuineness of the Christian is made to appear, the goldsmiths' hallmark is a small affair, but you know true silver by it.

There is a vast deal of difference between the man who gladly bears Christ's shoes, and another who will not stoop to anything which he thinks beneath him. Even a Pharisee will ask Christ to his house to sit at meat with him, he is willing to entertain a great religious leader at his table, but it is not everyone who will stoop down and unloose His shoes, for that very Pharisee who made the feast neither brought Him water to wash His feet, nor gave Him the kiss of welcome, he proved the insincerity of his hospitality by forgetting the little things.

I will be bound to say Martha and Mary never forgot to unloose His shoe-latchets, and that Lazarus never failed to see that His feet were washed. Look then, I pray you, as Christians to the service of Christ in the obscure things, in the things that are not recognized by men, in the matters which have no honor attached to them, for by this shall your love be tried.

Mark also, with regard to little works that very often *there is about them a degree of personal fellowship with Christ which is not seen in greater work*. For instance, in the one before us, to unloose the latches of His shoes brings me into contact with Himself, though it be only His feet I touch. And I think if I might have the preference between going forth to cast out devils and to preach the Gospel and to heal the sick, or to stay with Him and always loose the latches of His shoes, I should prefer this last, because the first act Judas did—he went with the twelve and saw Satan like lightning fall from heaven,

but he perished because he failed in the acts that came into contact with Christ—in keeping Christ's purse he was a thief, and in giving Christ the kiss he was a traitor.

He who does not fail in things relating personally to Christ is the sound man, he has the evidence of righteousness of heart. There was never a grander action done beneath the stars than when the woman broke her alabaster box of precious ointment and poured it upon Him. Though the poor did not get anything out of it, though no sick man was the better for it, the act was done distinctly unto Him, and therefore there was a peculiar sweetness in it.

Oftentimes similar actions, because they do not encourage other people for they do not know of them, because they may not be of any very great value to our fellow men, are lightly esteemed, yet seeing they are done for Christ, they have about them a peculiar charm as terminating upon His blessed person. True, it is but the loosing of shoe-latchets, but then, they are *His* shoes, and that ennobles the deed.

Dear fellow Christians, you know what I mean, though I cannot put it into very good language this morning—I mean just this, that if there is some little thing I can do for Christ, though my minister will not know about it, though the deacons and elders will not know, and nobody will know, and if I leave it undone nobody will suffer any calamity because of it, but if I do it, it will please my Lord, and I shall enjoy the sense of having done it to Him, therefore will I attend to it, for it is no slight work if it be *for Him*.

Mark also, once more, concerning those gracious actions which are but little esteemed by the most of mankind, that we know *God accepts our worship in little things*.

He allowed His people to bring their bullocks, others of them to bring their rams, and offer them to Him, and these were persons of sufficient wealth to be able to afford a tribute from their herds and flocks, but He also permitted the poor to offer a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons, and I have never found in God's Word that He cared less for the turtledove offering than He did for the sacrifice of the bullock.

I do know too, that our ever blessed Lord Himself, when He was here, loved the praise of little children. They brought neither gold nor silver like the wise men from the East, but they cried "Hosanna," and the Lord was not angry with their Hosannas, but accepted their boyish praise. And we remember that a widow woman cast into the treasury two mites, which only made a farthing, but because it was all her living, He did not reject the gift, but rather recorded it to her honor.

We are now quite familiar with the incident, but for all that it is very wonderful. Two mites that make a farthing given to the infinite God! A farthing accepted by the King of kings! A farthing acknowledged by Him who made the heavens and the earth, who saith, "If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the cattle on a thousand hills are mine." Two mites received with pleasure by the Lord of all! It was scarcely so much as a drop thrown into the sea, and yet *He* thought much of it.

Measure, therefore, not little actions by human scales and measures, but estimate them as God does, for the Lord hath respect unto the hearts of His people. He regardeth not so much their deeds in themselves as the motives by which they are actuated. Therefore, value the loosing of the Savior's shoe-latchets, and despise not the day of small things.

II. Now, brethren and sisters, I wish to conduct you, in the second place, to the consideration of OUR OWN UNWORTHINESS, which is sure to be felt by us whenever we come practically into contact with any real Christian service.

I believe that a man who does nothing at all thinks himself a fine fellow, as a general rule. You shall usually find that the sharpest critics are those who never write, and the best judges of battles are those who keep at a prudent distance from the guns. Christians of the kid-gloved order, who never make an attempt to save souls, are marvelously quick to tell us when we are too rough or too light in our speech, and they readily detect us if our modes of action are irregular or too enthusiastic. They have a very keen scent for anything like fanaticism or disorder.

For my part, I feel pretty safe when I have the censures of these gentlemen, we are not far wrong when they condemn us. Let a man begin earnestly to work for the Lord Jesus, and he will soon find out that he is unworthy of the meanest place in the employ of one so glorious. Let us turn over that fact a minute.

Dear brothers and sisters, when we *recollect what we used to be* I am sure we must feel unworthy to do the very least thing for Christ. You know how Paul describes the wickedness of certain offenders and he adds, "But such were some of you." What hardness of heart some of us exhibited towards God! what rebellion! what obstinacy! what quenching of His Spirit! what love of sin!

Why, if I might stoop down to unloose the latchet of the shoe of that foot which was crucified for me, I must bedew the nail print with my tears and say, "My Savior, can it be that I am ever allowed to touch Thy feet?" Surely, the prodigal, if he ever unloosed his father's shoes, would say to himself, "Why, these hands fed swine, these hands were often polluted by harlots, I lived in uncleanness, and was first a reveler, and then a swineherd, and it is amazing love which permits me now to serve so good a father."

Angels in heaven might envy the man who is permitted to do the least thing for Christ, and yet they never sinned. Oh, what a favor that we who are defiled with sin should be called to serve the sinless Savior.

But then, another reflection comes at the back of it—we *recollect what we are* as well as what we were—I say, what we are, for though washed in Jesus' blood, and endowed with a new heart and a right spirit, yet we start aside like a deceitful bow, for corruption dwells in us. It is sometimes hard work to maintain even a little faith, we are so double-minded, so unstable, so hot, so cold, so earnest, and then so negligent. We are so everything except what we ought to be, that we may well wonder that Christ allows us to do the least thing for Him.

If he were to shut us in prison and keep us there, so long as He did not actually execute us He would be dealing with us according to mercy, and not giving us our full deserts, and yet He calls us out of prison, and puts us in His service, and therefore we feel that we are unworthy to perform the least action in His house.

Besides, beloved, even *small services we feel require a better state of heart than we often have*. I am sure the service of preaching the Gospel here often brings to my sight my unworthiness far more than I should otherwise see it. If it is a gracious thing to see one's sinfulness, I may thank God I preach the Gospel, for it makes me see it.

Sometimes we come to preach about Jesus Christ and glorify Him, and yet our heart is not warm towards Him, and we do not value Him aright. While the text we are preaching from seats Him on a high throne, our heart is not setting Him there, and oh, then we think we could tear our heart out of our very body, if we could get rid of the black drops of its depravity which prevent our feeling in unison with the glorious truth before us.

Another time, perhaps, we have to invite sinners and seek to bring them to Christ, and that wants so much sympathy that if Christ were preaching our sermon He would bedew it with His tears, but we deliver it with dry eyes, almost without emotion, and then we flog our hard heart that it will not stir and cannot be made to feel.

It is just the same in other duties. Have you not felt "I have to go and teach my class this afternoon, but I am not fit, I have been worried all the week with cares, and my mind is not up to the mark now. I hope I love my Lord, but I hardly know whether I do or not. I ought to be earnest about these boys and girls, but it is very likely I shall not be earnest, I shall sit down and go through my teaching as a parrot would go through it, without life, without love."

Yes, then you painfully feel that you are not worthy to unloose the lachets of your Lord's shoes. Possibly you are going this afternoon to visit a dying man, and you will try and talk to him about the way to heaven. He is unconverted. Now, you want a tongue of fire to speak with, and instead of that you have a tongue of ice. You feel, "O God, how can it be that I shall sit by that bedside and think of that

poor man, who will be in the flames of hell, perhaps, within a week, unless he receive Christ, and yet I shall coolly treat his tremendously perilous condition as though it were a matter of the very slightest consequence?"

Yes, yes, yes, we have had hundreds of times to feel that we are in and of ourselves not fit for anything. If the Lord wanted scullions in His kitchen, He could get better than we are. And if He needed someone to shovel out the refuse of His house, He could find better men than we are for that. To such a Master we are unworthy to be servants.

The same feeling arises in another way. Have we not to confess, brethren and sisters, in looking upon what we have done for Christ, that *we have far too much eye to self in our conduct*. We pick and choose our work, and the picking and choosing is guided by the instinct of self-respect.

If we are asked to do that which is pleasant to ourselves we do it. If we are requested to attend a meeting where we shall be received with acclamation, if we are asked to perform a service which will lift us up in the social scale, or that will commend us to our fellow Christians, we jump at it like a fish at a fly. But suppose the work would bring us shame, suppose it would discover to the public rather our inefficiency than our ability, we excuse ourselves.

The spirit which Moses felt a little of when the Lord called him, is upon many of us, "If I were to speak for Christ," saith one, "I should stutter and stammer." As if God did not make stuttering mouths as well as fluent mouths, and as if, when He chose a Moses, He did not know what He was at. Moses must go and stammer for God, and glorify God by stammering, but Moses does not like that, and many in similar cases have not had grace enough to go to the work at all.

Why, if I cannot honor the Lord with ten talents, shall I refuse to serve Him with one? If I cannot fly like a strong-winged angel through the midst of heaven, and sound the shrill-mouthed trumpet so as to wake the dead, shall I refuse to be a little bee and gather honey at God's bidding? Because I cannot be a leviathan, shall I refuse to be an ant? What folly and what rebellion if we are so perverse.

And if you have performed any holy work, have you not noticed that pride is ready to rise? God can hardly let us succeed in any work but what we become top-lofty. "Oh, how well we have done it!" We do not want anybody to say, "Now, that was very cleverly, and nicely, and carefully, and earnestly done," for we say all that to ourselves and we add, "Yes, you were zealous about that work, and you have been doing what a great many would not have done, and you have not boasted of it either. You do not call in any neighbor to see it, you have been doing it simply out of love to God, and therefore, you are an uncommonly humble fellow, and none can say you are vain."

Alas! what flattery, but truly "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." We are not worthy to unloose the latches of Jesus' shoes, because if we do, we begin to say to ourselves, "What great folks we are. We have been allowed to loose the latches of the Lord's sandals." If we do not tell somebody else about it with exultation, we at least tell ourselves about it, and feel that we are something after all, and ought to be held in no small repute.

My brethren, we ought to feel that we are not worthy to do the lowest thing we can do for Christ, because *when we have gone to the lowest, Jesus always goes lower down than we have gone*. Is it a little thing to bear His shoes? What, then, was His condescension when He washed His disciples' feet? To put up with a cross-tempered brother, to be gentle with him and feel, "I will give way to him in everything because I am a Christian," that is going very low. But then, our Lord has borne far more from us. He was patient with His people's infirmities, and forgave even to seventy times seven.

And suppose we are willing to take the lowest place in the church, yet Jesus took a lower place than we can, for He took the place of the curse—He was made sin for us, even He that knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. I have sometimes felt willing to go to the gates of hell to save a soul, but the Redeemer went further, for He suffered the wrath of God for souls.

If there should be any Christian here who is so humble that he has no lofty thoughts about himself, but prefers to be least amongst his brethren, and so proves his graciousness, yet, my dear brother, you are not so lowly as Christ made Himself, for He "made himself of no reputation," and you have some

reputation left, and He took upon Himself the form of a servant, and He became obedient to death—you have not come to that yet, even the death of the cross—the felon’s death upon the gibbet, you will never be brought to that.

Oh, the stoop of the Redeemer’s amazing love! Let us, henceforth, contend how low we can go side by side with Him, but remember when we have gone to the lowest He descends lower still, so that we can truly feel that the very lowest place is too high for us because He has gone lower still.

Beloved friends, to put these things in a practical shape, it may seem to be a very small duty for any of you to do, to speak to one person alone about his soul. If you were asked to preach to a hundred you would try it. I ask you solemnly, in God’s name, not to let the sun go down today till you have spoken to one man or woman alone about his or her soul. Will you not do that? Is it too little for you? Then I must be plain with you, and say you are not worthy to do it.

Speak today to some little child about his soul. Do not say, “Oh, we cannot talk to children, we cannot stoop to them.” Let no such feeling occupy any of our minds, for if this work be as the loosing of the Master’s shoe-latchets, let us do it.

Holy Brainerd, when he was dying, and could no longer preach to the Indians, had a little Indian boy at his bedside, and taught him his letters, and he remarked to one who came in, “I asked God that I might not live any longer than I could be of use, and so, as I cannot preach any more, I am teaching this poor little child to read the Bible.” Let us never think that we are stooping when we teach children, but if it be stooping let us stoop.

There are some of you, perhaps, who have the opportunity to do good to fallen women. Do you shrink from such work? Many do. They feel as if they could do anything rather than speak to such. Is it the loosing of the latchet of your Master’s shoe? It is, then, an honorable business, try it, brother. It is not beneath you if you do it for Jesus, it is even above the best of you, you are not worthy to do it.

Possibly there is near your house a district of very poor people. You do not like going in among them. They are dirty and perhaps infected with disease. Well, it is a pity that poor people should so often be dirty, but pride is dirty too. Do you say, “I cannot go there”? Why not? Are you such a mighty fine gentleman that you are afraid of soiling your hands? You will not unloose your Master’s shoe-latchet then.

The Lord lived among the poor, and was poorer even than they, for He had not where to lay His head. Oh, shame on you, you wicked and proud servant of a condescending, loving Lord! Go about your business, and unloose the latchets of His shoes directly! Instead of imagining that you would be lowered by such work for Jesus, I tell you it would honor you, indeed, you are not fit for it, the honor is too great for you, and it will fall to the lot of better men.

It comes to this, beloved, anything that can be done for Christ is too good for us to do. Somebody wanted to keep the door! Somebody wanted to rout out the back lanes! Somebody wanted to teach ragged roughs! Somebody wanted to ask people to come to the place of worship, and to lend them their seats, and stand in the aisle while they sit. Well, be it what it may, I had rather be a door keeper in the house of the Lord, or the doormat either, than I would be accounted amongst the noblest in the tents of wickedness.

Anything for Jesus, the lower the better; anything for Jesus, the humbler the better; anything for Jesus. The more going down into the deeps, the more thrusting the arms up to the elbows in the mud to find out precious jewels, the more of that the better. This is the true spirit of the Christian religion.

Not the soaring up there to sit among the choristers, and sing in grand style, not the putting on of apparel, and preaching in lawn sleeves, not the going through gaudy and imposing ceremonies—all that is of Babylon. But to strip yourself to the shirt sleeves to fight the battle for Christ, and to go out among men as a humble worker, resolved by any means to save some, this is what your Lord would have you to do, for this is the unloosing the latchets of His shoes.

III. And now, our last remark shall be that ALL THIS OUGHT TO STIMULATE US AND NOT DISCOURAGE US.

Though we are not worthy to do it that is the reason why we should avail ourselves of the condescending grace which honors us with such employ. Do not say, "I am not worthy to unloose the latches of His shoes, and therefore, I shall give up preaching." Oh no, but preach away with all the greater vigor. John did so, and to his preaching he added warning. Warn people as well as preach to them. Tell them of the judgment to come, and separate between the precious and the vile.

We should perform our work in all ways, not omitting the more painful part of it, but going through with whatever God has appointed to us. John was called to testify of Christ, he felt unworthy to do it, but he did not shirk the work. It was his life-long business to cry, "Behold, behold, behold the Lamb of God!" and he did it earnestly, he never paused in that cry.

He was busy in baptizing too. It was the initiatory rite of the new dispensation, and there he stood continually immersing those who believed. Never a more indefatigable worker than John the Baptist, he threw his whole soul into it because he felt he was not worthy to do the work.

Brethren and sisters, your sense of unworthiness will, if you are idle, sadly hamper you, but if the love of God be in your soul you will feel, "Since I do so badly when I do my best, I will always do my utmost. Since it comes to so little when the most is done, I will at least do the most." Could I give all my substance to Him, and give my life, and then give my body to be burned, it would be a small return for love so amazing, so divine, as that which I have tasted. Therefore, if I cannot do all that, at any rate, I will give the Lord Jesus all I can, I will love Him all I can, I will pray to Him all I can, I will talk about Him all I can, and I will spread His Gospel all I can, and no little thing will I count beneath me if His cause require it.

Brethren, John lived hard, for his meat was locusts and wild honey, his dress was not the soft raiment of men who live in palaces, he wrapped about him the rough camel's skin, and as he lived hard he died hard too, his boldness brought him into a dungeon, his courageous fidelity earned him a martyr's death.

Here was a man who lived in self-denial and died witnessing for truth and righteousness, and all this because he had a high esteem of his Master. May our esteem of Christ so grow and increase that we may be willing to put up with anything in life for Christ, and even to lay down our lives for His name's sake!

Certain Moravian missionaries, in the old times of slavery, went to one of the West Indian Islands to preach, and they found they could not be permitted to teach there unless they themselves became slaves, and they did so, they sold themselves into bondage, never to return, that they might save slaves' souls.

We have heard of another pair of holy men who actually submitted to be confined in a lazaret house that they might save the souls of lepers, knowing as they did that they would never be permitted to come out again. They went there to take the leprosy and to die, if by so doing they might save souls. I have read of one, Thome de Jesu, who went to Barbary amongst the Christian captives, and there lived and died in banishment and bondage, that he might cheer his brethren, and preach Jesus to them.

Brethren, we have never reached to such devotion, we fall far short of what Jesus deserves. We give Him little, we give Him what we are ashamed not to give Him. Often we give Him our zeal for a day or two and then grow cool, we wake up on a sudden and then sleep all the more soundly. We seem today as if we would set the world on fire, and tomorrow we scarce keep our own lamp trimmed. We vow at one time that we will push the church before us and drag the world after us, and by and by we ourselves are like Pharaoh's chariots with the wheels taken off, and drag along right heavily.

Oh, for a spark of the love of Christ in the soul! Oh, for a living flame from off Calvary's altar, to set our whole nature blazing with divine enthusiasm for the Christ who gave Himself for us that we might live! Henceforth, take upon yourselves in the solemn intent of your soul this deep resolve, "I will unloose the latches of His shoes. I will seek out the little things, the mean things, the humble things, and I will do them as unto the Lord and not unto men, and may He accept me even as He has saved me through His precious blood." Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 8 AND LUKE 3:1-22

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.