

THE SPHERE OF INSTRUMENTALITY

NO. 1052

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 26, 1872,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Jesus said, Take you away the stone.”
John 11:39.

“Jesus said unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”
John 11:44.

THERE lay Lazarus in the grave, dead. His restoration to life was utterly hopeless upon any ordinary principles. Certainly Lazarus could not raise himself, his affectionate sisters could not, with all their weeping, give him a resurrection, nor could the disciples call back the departed spirit, and reanimate the decaying corpse. It was a hopeless case, for who could revive a dead man who had lain in the grave so long that he had begun to stink.

Now, this is a parallel case with that of every unconverted sinner in the world. He is dead in trespasses and sins—not a little sick or somewhat wounded, or in a swooning fit—but spiritual death reigns over him. The sinner never gives life to himself. The thing is inconceivable. There are persons who imagine that the natural will of man sometimes inclines towards good, but alas, this flattering supposition is far from the fact. Jesus said, “You will not come unto me, that you might have life,” neither will they come now any more than they did then.

Until we see dead men raising themselves, we do not expect to meet with sinners who have spontaneously and without divine assistance turned themselves towards righteousness. Neither can relatives nor friends regenerate the soul in which they take an interest, nor can the most earnest ministers bestow the quickening spirit. Those whom God has blessed in other instances are yet quite powerless in any fresh case, unless the same power shall anew be put forth through them.

Death is a terrible picture of our natural state, but it is by no means an exaggerated one. The whole world lies before us as a valley of dry bones, according to Ezekiel's vision, and if ever the dry bones are to live, it will not be through energy innate within themselves, nor through a power resident in the most zealous of men, nor through any might which even a prophet could exert apart from God. Education cannot develop life out of death, persuasion cannot excite it there, reasoning cannot infuse it—the divine arm must be revealed, or the case is past hope.

Jesus must come to the tomb of Lazarus, and His voice must cry, “Lazarus, come forth,” or else the corpse shall remain inanimate and increase in putrefaction. All that can be done by mortal man may be done, but nothing will be effected, unless Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life, shall speak the quickening word. In His omnipotent voice lies the power, but only there. Now, let this be taken as a plain statement of our belief as to the Lord's work in salvation, and taken without any mitigation or dilution. We believe that in every case salvation is of the Lord alone and altogether. Regeneration is a supernatural work. Man must be born again from above—any power short of that from heaven will be ineffectual. The new creation is as much and entirely the work of God as the old creation—

“Can aught beneath a power divine
The stubborn will subdue?
'Tis Thine Eternal Spirit, Thine
To form the heart anew.

*To chase the shades of death away,
And bid the sinner live!
A beam of heaven, a vital ray,
'Tis Thine alone to give."*

But having said this, we proceed to bear witness that what can be done by us ought to be done, since what can be done by man will not be done by Christ. It is a rule with our Lord never to work needless miracles. Indeed, He only begins the miraculous when the ordinary means can go no further. He follows the ordinary up to its verge, and then the extraordinary comes in. If a multitude are to be fed, so long as there are barley loaves and fishes to be had, Jesus will use them, He will multiply them and make them go further than they naturally could, but He will use them as far as they will go. Had there been neither loaf nor fish I do not doubt He would have commenced with an act of creation, but as it was, since there were a few loaves and fishes He does not ignore them, but makes them the basis of a work of multiplication.

What a man can do for himself God will not do for him, and what Christian people can do for sinners they must not expect the Lord to do, they must work themselves according to the ability God has given them up to the point of possibility, and then they may look for divine interposition.

Observe in this instance that there was a stone before the mouth of the cave in which Lazarus was interred. Could not our Lord have removed that stone with a word? Could not He have said, "Be you removed hence, O stone," and it would have been done? Ay, He could have consumed the stone with a glance if He had so minded, but He did not choose to do so, because the bystanders were quite competent to take away the stone, therefore He said to them, "Take you away the stone."

And when Lazarus was raised, when he had come forth from the niche in which his friends had laid him, he was enshrouded with the cerements of the tomb, rolls of linen were about his body, and a napkin enwrapped his head, and Jesus did not by divine power remove the vestments of the grave. It would have been, if miracles may be compared, a smaller miracle to loose the living with a word than it was to quicken the dead, but since it could be done without a miracle, it must be done without a miracle, and Jesus said to those who stood by, "Loose him, and let him go."

The analogy teaches us that there are some things which we can do for the unconverted, and we are bound to do them, and there are certain other things in which we can aid those who are newly converted, and these we should hasten to perform. While we look alone to the life-giving Lord to quicken the soul, we do not fold our arms in indifference, or excuse ourselves from all effort upon the ground of inability, but we are on the watch to see where instrumentality is applicable, and ready at all times to be made useful wherever we can be. We cannot turn the dry bones into living men, but we can prophesy to them, and blessed be God, we can also prophesy to the four winds, and so by our means the dead may live. The sphere of human action in connection with regeneration is my subject this morning. Help us, O Divine Spirit.

First, there are some things which we can do for the unconverted *before they are quickened*. He said, "Take you away the stone," secondly, there are some things which we can do for them *after they have been quickened*. He said, "Loose him, and let him go."

I. First, then, dear brethren, THERE ARE SOME THINGS WHICH WE CAN DO FOR THE UNCONVERTED BEFORE THEIR QUICKENING.

I am sure, if our hearts are right, all that can be done we are most anxious to do. Jesus Christ is our model, and observe how He labored in the work of blessing the sons of men. In this case He took a long journey, He wept, He groaned, He was troubled in spirit, He prayed, and then He spoke with a loud voice. True picture of what every Christian should be, and especially every Christian minister. We should journey after souls, we should weep over their ruined estate, we should groan for them, and be troubled at heart on their account, we should be incessant in our prayers, and when God speaks through us to the awaking of the dead, it should not be with tones unearnest, but with a voice tender with love,

and vehement with zeal. We are to be imitators of Christ in this, we ought to throw our whole heart into the blessed work which He honors us to do in His name.

Brethren, all of us can do for the ungodly what the sisters did for their brother. Mary and Martha called in the Master to minister to their sorrow. Being well assured when their brother was ill that they had no more sympathizing or able friend in the entire world than the Master whom they loved, they sent a message to Jesus, and though they did not send another afterwards, yet I doubt not they felt that the former one sufficed. So you and I ought in the case of all the unconverted over whom our spirit yearns, to call the Savior to the rescue. Let us send a message to Him about them.

You may word it in some such terms as these, "O Lord, I grieve to tell you that my dear child is still unsaved," or thus, "Lord, You know Your servant's heart breaks because my wife, or my husband, is still unconverted," or, you may put it thus, "O Savior, You know that in my Sunday school class, the children are not yet brought to You," or, I may send it as my message, "My God, You know I have preached to many of these people for many years, and yet they still remain unmoved, and abide as strangers to their God." We must earnestly intercede with the Lord for souls. Jesus is the Wonder-worker. He is the resurrection and the life, and our wisdom is to lay hold upon His strength, and beseech Him to reveal His saving might.

In addition to this we must then express our confident faith in Jesus, that even now whatsoever He will ask of God, God will give it Him. We must believe that He is able to raise the spiritually dead. We must never allow ourselves to despair of any person, since the matter is in the hands of an Almighty Savior. Though the sinner by this time stinks and has become immoral, as well as unholy, yet it is not too late to ask the Lord Jesus to work.

We ought never to say of any person, "It would be vain for us to labor for his conversion, he is so vicious as to be incapable of grace." We are not thus to forestall man's condemnation, but rather to obey the Master's message and go into all the world with good news for every creature, for the Gospel is without limitation when it declares, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Beloved, have faith in the Lord Jesus, tell Him how desperate the case is for you, but say to Him, "Lord, it is not impossible with You." Assure Him that while you feel yourself to have no power, you are sure that one single word from Him will effect all that your soul desires.

Now, this every believer can do, God helping us we can repair by faith to the Lord Jesus. But our first text indicates yet more clearly the line of our capacity. Jesus employed others in the rolling away of the stone. You cannot make the dead live, but you can take the stone away from the mouth of their sepulcher. Let us speak of certain stones which we should with all diligence remove.

The first is the stone of *ignorance*. This heavy weight lies at the mouth of many a spiritual grave at this day. I think we take for granted too high an attainment of knowledge amongst the people at this present time. I am sure that many sermons are preached to people as though they perfectly understood the plan of salvation, whereas, if the preacher did but know his hearers better, he would discover that even upon the elements of the Gospel of Christ many of them are deplorably ignorant. In fact, I fear that the elementary truths of Christianity are not preached sufficiently often because too much is taken for granted. It is to be feared that the alphabet of the Gospel is unknown to thousands whose teachers are trying to instruct them in the classics of theology—a waste of effort and a dangerous experiment.

Why, in this city of London you shall find persons who frequent Protestant places of worship who yet believe in salvation by their own works, and are horrified at justification by faith. You shall discover, if you go among the masses, an indifference to salvation so great as to be appalling, and this originates largely in ignorance. Salvation! why thousands do not know what you mean by the term, and here, in this century of light and advancement as we boastfully call it, gross darkness covers the minds of a large proportion of our countrymen.

Brethren, the time has not come for you to cease distributing the plainest tracts, the time has not arrived for you to be silent at the street corners even upon the first principles of the faith, you must still proclaim atonement by the sacrifice of Christ and the simple doctrine of justification by faith. Possibly

there may come an age when it will be wise to expatiate mainly upon the deep things of God, but for this present distress, we may wisely give our whole strength to telling out the foundation fact, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Our sermons must repeat times out of number the story of the cross. The hymns most commonly sung should be of the same order as—“Rock of ages, cleft for me,” “Jesus, lover of my soul,” “Come, you sinners, poor and wretched,” and “Just as I am, without one plea.” We have even need of such simple ditties as—“I do believe, I will believe, that Jesus died for me.” For upon that point ignorance and unbelief still cloud the mass of the people among whom we dwell. Let not the people be destroyed for lack of knowledge. Let none go down to hell because they know not of a Savior.

Let me say here that even with those who have heard the Gospel well preached, this ignorance may still remain, as it did in my own case. I believe if I had known that all I had to do was to look to Christ and I should live, if I had really understood that there was nothing for me to be, nor feel, nor do, but that I had only to rest in a finished work and take from God’s mercy that which Christ had completed, I think if I had known that truth I should have found peace with God before, but I did not understand the Gospel, and therefore remained in distress of mind. Do, then, tell everybody about Jesus, tell them of the Son of God made flesh, tell them about substitution, speak the word plainly, tell them—

***“He bore that we might never bear
His Father’s righteous ire.”***

Assure them that whosoever believes in Him is not condemned, and that to believe is to trust. Open up that word, for even plain and simple words get to be technical, and men dream that there is some other meaning in them than that which they ordinarily have. You cannot put the Gospel too plainly, but anyhow, do put it before them, and thus roll away this stone from the mouth of the sepulcher.

Alas, a second stone is often there, namely that of absolute *error*. That the mind be without knowledge is not good, for if we sow not wheat, weeds will assuredly spring up. Men ignorant of God’s righteousness always go about to establish their own righteousness in some way or other. Thousands think that if they are sober, honest, upright, and so on, they have done all that is required of them, at least a little spice of attendance at church or chapel, and just a little addition of religious ceremonies, may eke out any deficiencies of their practice, and certainly, to call in a clergyman or minister when they shall lie dying, and to have prayers said or read to them, will complete the structure which they have themselves begun.

Brethren, this great stone covers many an Englishman’s grave, seek to roll it away. Bear your own personal protest against the idea that the law of God will ever be satisfied by an imperfect obedience. Teach men that God’s commandment is exceeding broad, that it deals with the thoughts and intents of the heart as well as with men’s outward actions, and when they see this, perhaps they will perceive the impossibility of ever keeping the law of God, and they will leave off attempting to work out salvation by an obedience of their own. Show them plainly, lovingly, tenderly, but yet honestly, that by the works of the law there shall no flesh be justified, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

You know well, my brethren, that there are attempts made continually to place a huge stone of error over men’s minds in the form of sacramentarianism. Regeneration, to what do they degrade it? They make it a ceremony in which drops of water effect marvels. Feeding upon Christ, what is that with these men? It is nothing but the eating of bread and drinking of wine. They put ceremonial inanities into the place of spiritual verities, they steal the substance, and as a substitute they do not even give us so fair a shadow as that of the days of Moses, but a mere smoke, a shade of a shade, rather blinding to the eyes than suggestive to the mind, and yet myriads of our fellow men are quite content with such vanities. They suppose that there is some mystic efficacy in outward rites. Tell them, oh, tell them, that—

*“Not all the outward forms of earth,
Nor rites that God has given,
Nor will of man, nor blood, nor birth,
Can raise a soul to heaven.”*

Declare the need of grace and the uselessness of outward show, the spirituality of acceptable worship, and the childishness of ritualism. You will have done good service if you roll away this huge obstruction.

Very frequently the sepulcher of men’s souls is closed up by the stone of *prejudice*. Men cannot really find anything faulty in Christ Jesus, or in His Gospel, but still they will persist in stumbling at this stumbling stone. They invent reasons for declining the Gospel invitation. They prejudge the revelation of God, and make up their minds that it is unworthy of their acceptance. They shut their eyes, and then are obstinate in their assertion that there is no light.

For instance, how common is the notion that religion is associated with melancholy. In every sphere of life, you will find a number of persons who fight shy of understanding religion, because they believe it to be the mother of mental miseries. They quote someone who went insane, and took to Biblical speculations, and another who is morose, and yet is a great stickler for devotion. They infer that religion is the science of making long faces, the art of being gloomy. Hence, men refuse to be soured by “crabbed divinity,” and decline to imitate the morose and melancholy Puritans. A wonderful mistake that about the Puritans, for there is evidence enough, and more than enough, to show that they were among the most happy of men, with a robust joy to which the Cavaliers’ noisy mirth was mere froth.

At this present moment, if you desired to find a happy people, I would advise you to search in the church of God for them. It were a strange thing if to have one’s sins forgiven would make one unhappy, it were a very odd thing if being at peace with God caused a man to be wretched, it were a very turning of the world upside down, if the possession of a good hope of heaven should be the source of gloom in the soul. But it is not so.

Brethren, by your continual happiness and manifest cheerfulness roll away this stone, and especially remove it from the minds of young people. Make them see, in the brightness of your countenance, the practical answer to the common calumny. Convince them that you have an inward joy which they do not understand. Tempt them as it were to Christ, by telling them of the sweetness which you experience in Him.

Many have the notion too, that true religion makes a man unmanly and effeminate. Perhaps certain professors have lent a color to this charge by affectation of manners and absence of common sense. Certain religionists are always dwelling upon the “must nots” of religion, as if godliness was a set of negatives, a garden enclosed with thorns. The manufacture of new commandments is a very fascinating occupation for some people. You must not do this, and that, and the other, till one feels like a baby in leading strings. I find ten commandments are more than I can keep without a great deal of grace, and I do not mean to pay the slightest regard to any beyond. Liberty is the genius of our faith, nor do we mean to barter it away for the esteem of modern Pharisees. They say to us, “You shall not laugh on Sunday. You shall never create a smile in the house of God. You shall walk to public service as though you were going to the whipping post, and you shall take care when you preach that you do always make your discourse as dull as it can possibly be.” We do not reverence these precepts.

Anything which is of God we honor, but not the sickening decrees of cant. We are men, and not slaves. Our manhood is not annihilated by grace. We think, and speak, and act for ourselves, and are not the serfs of custom and fashion. We speak our minds even when propriety is shocked and respectability is enraged. I would always give to young men this piece of advice: Quit yourselves like men, let nobody have to say that your religion is mamby-pamby, and your conversation affected. Do not be always sugaring every person you speak of as, “Dear this,” and “Dear that,” for this savors of nauseous hypocrisy. Do not whine or turn up your eyes, or affect to be very devout. Be holy, but not showy; true,

but not obtrusive. Be men, be manly, be Christians, be like Christ. He was the very highest type of man, you never see anything stilted or unnatural in Him, He is always Himself, transparent, outspoken, brave, honest, true, and manly. Redeem religion from the reproach of stiltedness, and so roll away one of the stones from the sepulcher.

Some, we know, have a notion that religion is a mere sentiment, that it lies in being affected about your dead children and your parents in heaven, in weeping over death-bed scenes, in fact, is best seen in excited meetings and their consequent emotions. By worldlings religion is judged to consist in womanly feeling, but to have no truth, no facts, no philosophy at its back. Oh, but it is not so, we can give as good a reason for the hope that is in us as though our religion never brought a tear to our eye, and never stirred the emotion of joy within our souls. I venture to say it, that our religion is as much based on facts as astronomy or geology, I mean indisputable historical facts, and I assert that the doctrines of revelation are verities as certain as the demonstrations of mathematics.

The Gospel reveals certainties, and they are worthy of the contemplation of men of the most enlarged minds. Our Gospel is not mere platitude and baby talk, there is a depth in it which no intellect can fathom. Titanic intellects have found their match in the things of God. The genius of Newton and Locke did not complain of want of room in the wondrous truths of God, to them they were waters to swim in. There is room for all the high culture, and all the thought, and all the training that this world shall ever see, room for it, ay, and at its utmost, it shall only stand upon the shore of the main ocean of divine truth and cry, "O the depths of the wisdom of the Lord." By intelligently setting forth the great matters of the Gospel, let us roll this stone away, for to some it has been a crushing obstruction.

Very commonly among our working classes another stone lies over their grave, namely, the opinion that the Gospel is not for the like of them. I have frequently heard it expressed by them that it is very proper indeed for ladies and gentlemen, persons of money and leisure, to be religious, but it is quite out of the question for a man who has to earn his living, and tuck up his shirt sleeves to hard work. "Why," say they, "what have dockyard laborers, cabdrivers, and costermongers to do with religion?"

Now, of all the strange prejudices in existence, this is one of the strangest, because from time immemorial it has been the boast of the Gospel that "the poor have the Gospel preached to them," and if there be one class of the population to whom the Gospel is gladder tidings than to any other, it is to them that labor and are heavy laden.

Why, dear friends, if you have little in this life, there is the more reason why you should seek the boundless treasures of the life to come, and if you have much trouble and sorrow here, the more reason why you should seek Christ to be the balm of all your wounds, and the cordial of your cares. Christianity drew its apostles from the working classes, and from the same source it has gathered martyrs numberless. Though the Lord has had a remnant in the upper ranks, yet it has still been true, that "not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty are chosen."

The great mass of Christian discipleship has been taken from among the poor and the working men. Besides, Christ is the people's Christ. What a grand sentence is that of the Psalm, "I have exalted one chosen out of the people." Jesus is the people's man by birth, by education, and by sympathy. He was ordained of God to be a leader and commander for the people. Jesus Christ is just such a friend as the people want. Tell the people so, especially you who belong to them and know it. Make your houses preaching places to your fellow workmen, and make your conduct a constant sermon upon the adaptation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to their wants. So much for the stone of prejudice, but I must pass on.

Frequently, over the graves of spiritually dead persons, there lies a stone of *solitariness*. They feel as if no man cared for their soul. I have known that happen in this Tabernacle. Persons have come in for months and nobody has spoken to them because they were strangers, and therefore the Gospel did not enter into their hearts because they said, "The church of God does not care for us, we are unknown and unvalued." Half a word from some kind Christian sitting near them has been the means of melting them down, and the very next sermon they have heard has been in God's hands the means of bringing them to

Christ. In this city a man may lose himself more effectually than he could in the desert of Sahara. You may get away into one of our streets, ay, and work in one of our factories, and nobody will interest himself about you. While happily few pry into their neighbor's affairs, unhappily few have any sympathy for their neighbor's griefs. Hearts may be breaking around us, and we may be as merry as May. Children of God, I charge you in the name of the quickening Savior, never let this stone lie two Sundays together over the grave of a single attendant of this house, but prove to those who sit with you here that you have a loving care for their souls.

Another stone that can be rolled away is that of *degradation*. Some bring themselves into the ditch by their sins. They break the rules of society, they become dangerous, and at length are treated as outcasts. When a person feels himself outlawed how little hope there is of raising him. Many sink themselves to poverty by their vices and extravagances, and thousands degrade themselves by abominable drunkenness. The Christian church does well when it uses its utmost power to deliver the drunkard from his besetting sin. Temperance will not suffice instead of godliness, but it may put men in the way of Gospel influences. God forbid we should stop short in any reforms, for these will only roll away the stone from the grave, but yet, let no stone remain. Many a man has first been delivered from the habit of intoxication, and then his ear has been opened to listen to the truth as it is in Jesus.

The poor harlot too, when Christian love has followed her and spoken to her of our Father who is in heaven who bids the wandering return to Him, how often have her feelings of degradation been overcome, and she has fled to Christ for mercy.

Brethren, none are outcasts to us. If the world says to the fallen, "Get you gone, you are not good enough for us," let the church of God open her door and invite the outcasts in. The church is the true Hospital for Incurables, among whom Jesus delights to work. Those whom the world calls lepers and drives away into contempt, it is our glory to restore. Come hither, you chief of sinners, for Jesus waits to receive you. Make no tarry, for you and such as you, He came to save. The Pharisees repel you, but this man receives sinners and eats with them.

We will mention one more stone, and that is *despair*. Some men are not only spiritually dead, but they are buried fathoms deep in despair. They have signed their own death warrants, though the Lord has not yet written them out. You people of God, look out for those who think themselves beyond all hope, and when you meet with them argue the point with them. Tell them that you were once in the same plight as they are, and show them what grace did for you. Point them to the promises of God, which are so suitable to their condition, above all, tell them of the precious Savior, who does not quench the smoking flax, and who is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. You will have done good service if in any case you roll away the stone of despair. I exhort you, dear fellow laborers in Christ, yourselves saved, to do all that lies in you to take away every one of these hindrances from sinners' souls, and then pray the Lord to speak the quickening Word.

II. But my time goes too swiftly, and therefore I must come to my second point with brevity. AFTER A MAN IS CONVERTED he labors under many disabilities, and Christian love should help him.

When lambs are born, the shepherd takes care of them, Christ's word is, "Feed my lambs." When plants are put into the ground they must be watered. It is not enough that the child be born, it needs a mother's care. "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages" is God's word to His people whenever a new convert is born into the church. Lazarus is alive, but he is encumbered with grave clothes, and it is the business of those who are his friends to loose him and let him go.

New converts want loosing for the sake of their own *comfort*. It was a very uncomfortable thing for Lazarus to be tied up in his winding-sheets, for his own ease they must be taken off. When a man is saved, perhaps he does not grasp all that is involved in salvation. He thinks "I am a Christian, but I may fall from grace." Unwrap that band at once, and let him know that the Lord does not cast away His people whom He did foreknow. He thinks that he is pardoned, but that still some sin may remain upon him. Unwind that cerement, let him know that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all

sin.” Perhaps he fancies, when he feels strife within him, that he cannot be a child of God. Tear off that bandage, and tell him that all the children of God experience inward strife, and feel a battle raging between life and death within their souls. You will find young converts apt to be the victims of doubts and fears, perplexing themselves about this, and fretting themselves about that and you who are instructed in the faith must lay out yourselves to loose them, and let them go.

They want, also, loosing for their own *freedom*. Lazarus might as well be in the cave as be in bonds. Men may be converted, and yet be far from enjoying the full liberty of the children of God. Perhaps the saved one is fettered by bad habits, and he does not know that they are bad, tell him gently, but let him know that these things are not consistent with Christian life. I know at this time some real Christians who are going about with relics of their grave clothes upon them, and very unseemly they appear. Those grave clothes stick to all of us, more or less, and I suppose, till we enter heaven, the loosing operation will need to be continued, but let us help our brethren in this by example and by precept, let us take away from them that which hinders them from the liberty of holiness.

Moreover, Lazarus wanted loosing for the sake of *fellowship*. He could not talk with Mary and Martha yet, for he had a napkin about his head, he could scarce move or speak. So many of our dear converts do not like to join the church yet. They say they are not perfect. Poor souls, if they were we would not want them in our churches, being all imperfect ourselves, they would be out of place if they joined with us. They plead that they are not fit to come, imagining that something of fitness is wanted beyond believing in Christ, as if that which Jesus laid down as the Gospel of salvation was not also a sufficient basis for fellowship with saints on earth. Still, the timid hold back and do not like to communicate to others what the Lord has done for them. Encourage them, compel them to come in, do not let them wander in solitude, but introduce them to the fellowship of the saints.

We have known cases in which the liberty was wanted to enable them to bear *testimony*. Lazarus could not even say, “I live and blessed be the name of God,” for the napkin was about his head. He must be loosed that he may tell what God had done. Oh, what comfortable testimonies the church might have if saints were but encouraged to deliver them, but there are some who carry wet blankets about with them, and the moment a young Christian talks about Christ, because he does not speak exactly according to orthodoxy, they try to silence him. Let it never be so among us. Let us encourage the babes to cry that by and by they may learn to speak. Let us encourage them to prattle, for perhaps ere long they shall correctly speak the language of the kingdom.

As for testimony, so for *service* help is wanted. Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, but he did not know what God meant to do with him, and he was not fit for God to use till Ananias had instructed him. So with Apollos, he was a true Christian, but he wanted further teaching, he needed loosing and being let go, and therefore Aquila and Priscilla became the instruments thereof. There was the eunuch on his way to Ethiopia, he needed to learn more about the Scriptures, to have the meaning of the prophet Isaiah opened up to him, and to be baptized on profession of his faith in Christ. Do not suffer any of God’s dear living ones to be waiting bound up and captive, because we are so devoid of brotherly love that we will not do for them the needful offices of heavenly charity. The Lord help us, brethren, to be earnest about this.

Once more, after Lazarus was unbound, we read that he sat at the table with Jesus. So that he needed loosing for the enjoyment of *communion with Christ!* The trembling convert thinks himself as yet unwarranted to lay hold upon the nearer, dearer, and sweeter joys which surround the person of Christ, he dreams that these are reserved for old saints, that these wines on the lees well refined are for men who have fought the good fight and almost finished their course, but indeed, he errs and deprives himself of joy. The songs of Zion are for the early morning as well as for the shades of evening. Go and tell young Christians so, encourage them to commune with Jesus, tell them He loves all His people with an equal love, and is ready to manifest Himself to them as He does not unto the world. In this respect you will loose them, and let them go.

I will not prolong my talk, but finish with two inquiries, which I desire to put very plainly. The first is this: Dear brethren, I have told you what can be done for sinners before conversion. I have told you what can be done for them afterwards. I beg to inquire how many of you are doing either the one or the other. I will not take the writer's inkhorn and make a list of the diligent among you, but I will ask each man's conscience to officiate as a scribe, and to put down his name if he be really serving Christ. For, mark you, beloved, it is idle to talk about our duty, the thing is to be daily and constantly doing it. Time is gliding away, men are dying, hell is filling, and Christ's name is being dishonored. There are but twelve hours in the day, are we walking while we have the light, and working for God while we have the opportunity?

If every one of us will give an honest answer to that question it will do us good, even if we have to confess that we have been sluggards. It may lead to shame, and that to confession, and that to prayer, and that to a renovation of life, for if we are indeed the Lord's, let us live while we live. Much of professing life nowadays is a thing to be ashamed of—it is cold, weak, narrow, and timid. I see everywhere enthusiasm, except in the church, I see stir and push and vigor in business, I see the world girdled, that men may send the messages of commerce with lightning speed, while the message of the Gospel lags, I see the mountains bored, I know not next but the sea's deep bed may be tunneled. Earth for earth can do anything, but for heaven how little will earth perform. May God quicken us that we may be a living, earnest people.

The other inquiry is this, how far is the Lord Jesus working in our families, and among our connections, in the matter of raising the spiritually dead? Are your children saved yet? Are your servants regenerated yet? Brothers and sisters, are they saved yet? Husbands and wives, has God quickened them yet? Come, let us pass the question round. The angel said to Lot, "have you here any beside?" a very weighty question. Oh! that God may grant that you and I may be like Noah, who had all his sons, and his sons' wives, and his own wife in the ark with him. May we never leave off praying till it is so. If there be but one unconverted one in any way linked with us, let us pray day and night till that soul is saved, and then let us take up the neighborhood in which we dwell, and the streets where we reside.

This great city, this perishing city, God help it, and in mercy visit it. I believe He will, if He finds us willing to do the work of rolling away the stone, and equally willing to unloose the bands. God will not send children to us if we cannot nurse them, He will not send lambs to us if we will not shepherd them. God is not so unkind to new born souls as to send them among a people that do not care for them. He will make us travail in birth before children shall be born to God here, because soul travail is the means by which love is wrought in us towards them, and so we are taught to handle them affectionately, cherish them carefully, and bring them up for the Lord. O church beloved, over whom Christ rejoices, I charge you serve the Lord Jesus with diligence in this divine service of doing good to the sons of men.

God bless you, beloved, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 11:1-46.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. 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.