

A DEFINITE CHALLENGE FOR DEFINITE PRAYER

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A SERMON
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“And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?”
Mark 10:51

NO DOUBT our Lord’s disciples imagined that He was going up to Jerusalem to take unto Himself the Kingdom. They hoped that they should be partakers of that earthly grandeur which they had fondly pictured would glitter around the person of the Son of David. When, therefore, the blind man ventured to cry out clamorously to Him, whom they esteemed to be a great King, they thought it a daring intrusion.

Who was the son of Timaeus that he should say, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on me”? They were all anxious to hush the voice of misery in the presence of so much Majesty. But our Lord Jesus Christ did not spurn the blind man’s prayer as intrusive or impertinent. He was not angry with him. He did not even pass on without taking any notice. What He did was to stand still, and command the man to be brought to Him.

May we not draw some comfort from the thought that our prayers never are intrusions? Whenever we go before God in deep distress, He is always ready to hearken to our cry. Whatever grand purpose or momentous project engage His mind, He will surely be attentive to the longings of His needy suppliants. Though our Lord Jesus Christ is at this moment King of kings and Lord of lords, and inconceivably glorious, though hosts of angels count it their highest delight to do His bidding, yet He bears in heaven the same heart towards sinners which He had on earth.

Amidst the thunders of the everlasting hallelujahs, He can detect the sighs of the prisoners, the complaints of the sufferers, and the groans of the contrite. He will halt to give heed to the requests of blind beggars, and in His pity, He will relieve their distress. Should not this encourage those of you who are seeking Him? Whatever Satan may suggest to the contrary take this passage of God’s Word for cheer. He did hear the blind man’s cry when He was upon earth, and He will hear you now that He is in heaven.

And you, backsliding child of God, difficult as you may find it to pray, if enabled to vent your griefs, your sighs shall be heard, your tears shall be seen, and you shall certainly have an audience from Him who delights in mercy. There are times even with those who live nearest to God when they fall into despondencies, and imagine that their voice is shut out from heaven’s gate, but it is not so. When I cannot come to God as a saint, what a mercy it is that I may come to Him as a sinner! And if I have lost all my evidences, what a blessing it is that I need not stop to find them, that I may go to the mercy seat without any!

*“Just as I am without one plea,
But that His blood was shed for me.”*

When reduced to the utmost beggary as to internal grace, I find myself naked, and poor, and miserable, I may still hear God saying to me, “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed.” In our worst estate, prayer is still efficacious. Long as we live, let us pray. Until you hear the bolts of perdition fast closed upon you, and you are shut up in hell, doubt not the right of petition, or the prevalence of your earnest plea. There is an ear to hear in heaven so long as there is a heart to plead on earth.

Let this first impression be riveted on your minds, and you will, I trust, be prepared for three further reflections which I now wish to introduce to you. Our Lord, before He healed the blind man, said to Him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" Hence I infer that—

I. IT IS IMPORTANT A SEEKING SINNER SHOULD KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT HE REALLY WANTS, AND SOMETIMES CHRIST DELAYS TO GIVE SALVATION UNTIL MEN ARE BROUGHT MORE CLEARLY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS COMPREHENDED IN THAT INESTIMABLE BLESSING.

A large proportion of those persons who express a certain desire to be saved have no Scriptural idea whatever of what being saved is. I am afraid that many who profess to have found salvation are really the victims of religious excitement, greatly moved by the exhortations they have heard, yet little or in no degree enlightened as to the fundamental truths on which a good hope is based.

The most current idea, of course, is that to be saved means to be delivered from going down into the pit, from enduring the sentence of everlasting perdition. That it does comprise that, we grant you, though that is far from being its sole intent. This is a result of salvation, though it is not the essence of salvation as it is discovered to the souls of the redeemed.

Men are saved, blessed be God, many years before the time of death, and conscious of being saved too. In some respects they are as thoroughly and perfectly saved as they will be when they get to heaven. Salvation is not postponed till the day of judgment, when you shall have deliverance from hell, it may be enjoyed here on earth when your sins are forgiven, and you are redeemed from the present evil world.

Or it may be that you have a vague impression that salvation consists in *the pardon of your sins*. This is true, but it does not compass all the truth. When you say, "I would have my sins forgiven," do you know what sin is? Have you ever had any clear view of what it really means? We use certain terms and common words often, I fear, without a corresponding thought in our minds. Know, then, that you have broken God's law, both by omitting to do what you should have done, and by doing that which you should not have done.

Those ten commands which you will find in the twentieth chapter of Exodus are like so many looking glasses, in which you can see what you have done, and what you have not done, what crimes they are which cry out against you before the judgment throne of God, which will certainly drag you down to hell unless you are delivered from the dread penalty. Consider, too, the heavy weight, as well as the grievous guilt, of sin. Have you felt the load and burden of sin? "A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty," says Solomon, but ah! what specific gravity will compare with sin! Well might David groan beneath the load, "Mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me."

All the burdens that may devolve upon you through the toils of life, the calamities of the world, or the visitations of providence, cannot equal the load of sin, for this is a burden that oppresses the conscience, crushes the heart, and paralyzes every faculty of the soul. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit, who can bear?" A conscience stricken with a sense of sin will readily interpret that wounded spirit which is not bearable for a man. Were that terrible incubus to rest long upon him, his spirit would fail utterly before the Lord. If mercy did not come speedily to their rescue, men might soon lose their wits and become frantic, despondency leading to despair, and despair to insanity.

Oh! how venomous the poison of sin, when the arrows stick fast and fester! Have you known what sin is? If not, I am afraid your prayer will be unmeaning as that of James and John, to whom it was said, "Ye know not what ye ask." Have you ever had an idea, when asking for the forgiveness of sin, what sin really deserves? what kind of recompense it justly demands? Let it always be remembered by us that every sin we have committed exposes us to the wrath of God—a wrath that is represented by terrible pictures in God's Word, as a flame that is never quenched, a fire that never ceases to burn.

In order to deliver us from this penalty, it was absolutely necessary that someone else should bear this punishment on our behalf. I do not think that we intelligently ask for the pardon of sin unless we

have some view of the crucified Savior, the slaughtered Lamb, who stood in our room and stead, and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Ah! seeking soul, if you know the weight of sin, and if you know that Christ carried it, then you can say, "Lord, I would have my sins forgiven," in answer to the question, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"

And yet salvation includes more than deliverance from hell and a free pardon, for *it emancipates the soul from its dominant power*. Those among us who are saved from the guilt of sin are abundantly conscious that we are not fully released from the power of sin in our own breasts. Loved ones who have passed beyond the stars, and see God's face without a veil between, are saved, completely saved, from indwelling sin, but none of us here enjoy that blessed emancipation, though there are some who boast a perfection it were hard to prove, but alas! they slightly prejudice their profession by their pride. Still, salvation from the despotic power of sin must be achieved, and in a high degree it must be compassed by all believers, or they shall never see God's face with acceptance.

Brethren, we must have our reigning sins subdued. Know you not that no drunkard, or whoremonger, or covetous person that is an idolater, can have any inheritance in the kingdom of God? These sins must be cut off, they must be slain and overcome. And so far as any other sins are concerned, they must be no longer citizens of the heart. You must look upon them as intruders and aliens that are to be driven out, like the Canaanites out of the land of promise. Mortify, therefore, your members, subdue your lusts, overcome your corruptions.

"But," the man replies, "how can I do this?" A most fitting question! You cannot do it, but Christ says, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" His power is equal to every emergency. There is no sin too strong for Christ. During His sojourn on earth, there was no devil that He could not cast out, so there is no sin which He cannot eject and eradicate. A legion of devils fled at the fiat of our Lord. Doubt not that legions of furious lusts and fiery tempers can be overcome by the faith that pleads His prevailing name.

Brethren, let us never sit down content with small degrees of sanctification. Reason not with yourselves as though you could never get beyond your present dwarfed stature. Others have outgrown it. There have been men far more distinguished for piety, and humility, and every grace, than we are. The attainments to which the Master has led them are accessible to all saints under the same guidance, through the same divine power. Let us aspire to holiness. Let us follow after it with fresh ardor. Be not satisfied merely to live, but seek to grow, be not content to remain babies, taking your portion of milk, but seek to be strong men who shall enjoy the strong meat of the Word of God.

Now I believe there are hundreds of persons who have no desire to be saved, and would rather not be saved, if this is what salvation means. Why, man, if you are saved, you will be saved from those pleasurable sins in which now you are wont to revel. Some of you, when you get a holiday, following the inclinations of a corrupt heart and a vicious taste, hie you off to haunts where birds of your own feather congregate. Should you be saved, you will seek far different society. The company you now love you will then hate, and the pleasures you enjoy so much now will become as detestable as they were delightful to you.

When you say, "Lord, save me," do you mean, "Lord, save me from being what I am, Lord, I have been a drunkard, make me sober; I have been unchaste, make me pure; I have been dishonest, make me upright; I have been deceitful, make me speak the truth to my neighbor; I have been violating Your statutes, make me mindful of Your Word; I have been Your enemy, Lord, make me Your friend; I have made my belly my god, now do You be my God; I desire to be reconciled to You, so that Your will shall be my will, Your service my delight, and Your way the path which I shall choose"?

Do you mean that? If any man says honestly, "I do desire to be saved from sin," I do not think you will long have such a desire ungratified, but the Lord Jesus will say, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." He can and He will save you, if that is what you mean.

As for you good Christian people who are seeking the conversion of sinners, *try to go about it in Christ's own way*. It is right for you to exhort them to believe in Christ. I like to hear you sing—

“There is life in a look at the Crucified One;”

but do recollect that a man must have some understanding, both of what sin is, and of what the Savior is, before he can believe, for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God,” Endeavor, therefore, to instruct persons in the Gospel. Merely to exhort them to believe, to simply cry, “Believe, believe, believe!” is of little worth, however earnest a man may be in raising that cry, for the sinner naturally inquires, “What is it that I have to believe? On whom am I to believe? For what reason am I to believe? Why do I need to believe?”

So, go about your work of soul-winning in the power of the Holy Spirit. Go about it intelligently, understanding that, as Jesus Christ would not open the blind man’s eyes till He had first made him state, not for Christ’s information, but for the man’s own cognizance, what it was that he wanted, and made him say, “Lord, that I may receive my sight,” so must you endeavor, when you proclaim the Gospel, to let men know what their need of that Gospel is, give them not merely the expostulations, the admonitions, and the exhortations of the Gospel, but give them its instructions likewise. Or else you go and bid them come, and there is no feast, you invite them to the waters, but you do not tell them what the waters are.

Let it be with you, then, henceforth to instruct sinners in the way of the Lord. As David says, “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.” We will leave that first homily and proceed to a second.

Our text clearly indicates to us all—

II. THE GREAT NECESSITY OF PRAYING WITH A DIRECT OBJECTIVE.

This poor man was not allowed to pray in general. “Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me,” a very proper prayer, and a very blessed prayer, but certainly it was a very wide prayer. So he was encouraged to be more specific in his request. “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” You ask for mercy, what form of mercy do you need? In what particular shape shall the bountiful hand dispense the mercy to you?” The blind man at once replies, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.” He hits the mark with precision. It is sight he wants, and for sight he asks.

This is the right way for believers to pray. I wish we had more of it in our prayer meetings, I do not find fault, for we have had blessed seasons of prayer here, but rest assured that those are the best prayers in all respects, if they are earnest and sincere, which go most directly to the point. You know there is a way of praying in the closet, and praying in the family, in which you do not ask for anything. You say a great many good things, introduce much of your own experience, review the doctrines of grace very thoughtfully, but you do not ask for anything in particular. Such prayer is always uninteresting to listen to, and I think it must be rather tedious to those who offer it.

A Negro, who was noted for his great earnestness in prayer, was once asked how it was that whenever he prayed, he seemed to be so earnest, and he said, “Because I always have an errand when I go to the King, I always have an errand, I go to Him knowing that I need something, and I ask Him for it, and I stop till He gives it to me, and if He does not give it to me, I ask Him again and again, for I know what I am at.”

Of what avail were it to keep on going in and out of a banker’s door all day if you have no business to transact, and nothing to get? But it is quite different when you go up to the counter with your check and receive in return the golden sovereigns. It would be very uninteresting to wait upon Her Majesty every morning and evening with an address which merely said, “Your Majesty’s attached and most loyal subject,” if you never asked for anything.

Yet how much prayer of that kind is addressed to heaven, sheet lightning prayer—not the forked flash that does the work, like shooting arrows up at the moon, instead of imitating David, when he said, “In the morning *will I direct* my prayer unto thee.” He looked at the target, marked the bull’s-eye, then drew the bow, and after he had shot the arrow he adds, “And will look up”—as if to see whether the

arrow really went to the mark, whether the prayer had sped with God so that a gracious answer would be given.

Should we not sometimes, when alone, and about to pray, sit down a little while to consider what we are about to ask? Should we not often pray better if we recollected that the preparation of the heart in man, as well as the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord, and that the preparation of the heart precedes the answer of the tongue? In offering our sacrifices to God, this helter-skelter ill becomes us.

Not with heedless step should we rush into His presence. The decorum which is due to a king's court might admonish us of the reverence due to the King of kings. Although we enjoy the privileged familiarity which permits us to say, "*Our Father*," as dear children of the Lord of heaven and earth, let us never forget the humility that becomes us, the profound obeisance we owe as subjects of the great King. Tenderly He asks, devoutly may we answer, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"

Now, dear friends, let me challenge a plain answer to a plain question. As you are sitting here in this house, what is your desire before the Lord? Let your conscience make such a reply that when you get home, you may intelligently, in the closing prayer of the day, approach the Lord for what you want. What is the upper-most desire of your soul? Perhaps with some it is that some besetting sin may be overcome. "Oh!" you say, "what would I give could I but get rid of that bad temper of mine! It is my daily cross, and I do not want to harbor it." "Ah!" says another, "I am so unbelieving, a little trouble soon casts me down, oh! that I could get rid of my unbelief!"

Well now, very likely, dear friends, the sin you ought to pray against is one you are not striving against. Were I to come to you in the aisle, and take you by the button-hole, and tell you what your principle sin is, you would feel very vexed with me, for we are apt to resent the faithfulness of those who tell us of our faults. To touch the tender place makes the nerves tingle, and it seems like willful torture.

When somebody complains of something which our conscience does not endorse, we take it kindly, and accept their good intentions, thinking that had they known us better they would have esteemed us more highly, but if they really touch the sores where most they smart, we do not admire their treatment. The flush we feel—the blush we fain would hide. Yet cloak not now the vice which an Omniscient God discerns. Let this be a time of heart-searching. Say now, "Lord, is my sin covetousness?" That is a sin which never yet did I hear a man confess.

A Roman Catholic priest, who had heard the confessions of some two thousand persons, said he had heard men confess heinous iniquities of every kind, even murder and adultery, but that he never had heard any man confess covetousness. This is a crime they christen and call it by another name. A covetous man thinks he is prudent, he is just laying by a little money for a rainy day. His greed, he tells you, is not to gratify himself, but a generous impulse to provide for his family, for their wives and their children, they would have us believe, that they waste their strength and wither their souls. Nevertheless, their fortune is their fallacy. To grip and to grasp, to have and to hold is their desire so long as they live, and late enough they commonly leave it before they devise to their dear ones the possessions they can no longer retain.

Alas! we are often wicked enough to try to make our affection an excuse for our avarice. Let us come to the point honestly. When we are dealing with our sin, let us confess it with all its iniquity and its heinousness. Do not dissemble by accepting a small share in a public company.

David, when he wanted full discharge, said, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness." He acknowledged the atrocity when he sought the atonement—"Forgive my blood-guiltiness"—as one who saw his crime in the light of its consequence, not as one who attempted to palliate it with vain excuses! "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee in that matter?"

If you have no particular sin to confess—if that is not your uppermost anxiety at this time—what, then, is your petition? What want have you to be supplied? Is it some great want? Have you numerous little wants? They may all be told to God. Get a clear idea of what it is that you really do need that He should do for you, knowing that whatever your necessities may be, there is the promise, "My God shall

supply all your need”—not some of it, but “all your need,” not He *may* do it, but He *shall* do it, not you will have to supply it yourselves, but He will supply it, “My God shall supply all your need.” Think, therefore, what your want is, and then go to God.

Is there any choice blessing that you desire? Get a clear idea of the blessing before you pray for it. What form of blessing would you wish to have? Oh! if I might have my choice, it would be heavenly-mindedness. Oh! if a man could but get that, he need not make much account of where he lived, nor what he had to eat, nor how much he slept, nor how much he suffered, for a heavenly mind is heaven. The mind makes its own heaven here below, and up above. Though, doubtless, heaven has a locality—yet it is much more a state than a place. Oh! for more heavenly-mindedness!

What is it you would have? Communion with Christ? Love to souls? A broken heart? True humility? I may say of all these things, “The land is before thee, that thou mayest go forward and possess it, ask what thou wilt, and it shall be done unto thee.”

What promise is there that you would wish to have fulfilled to you tonight? It is a good exercise to sit down before evening prayer, and look out the promise that seems most suitable, or to ask the Lord to look it out for you, and apply it to your soul. Take this promise, if so be there is disease next door, “Lord, You have said, ‘Thousands shall fall at thy side, and tens of thousands at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee.’ Lord, fulfill that promise now.” Are you startled by a noise in the dead of night? Then quote this promise, “Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night.” Perhaps it is shortness of provision that troubles you. Then here is another promise, “Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure.”

When you lost a key the other day, and could not open the drawer, what did you do? You sent out for a locksmith and in he came with a whole bundle of old rusty keys. What for? Why, he looked out one that fit the lock of your drawer, and opened it for you at once. Now many people’s Bibles are just like that bundle of rusty keys. There is always a key in the Bible that will fit the wards in the lock of your necessities, if you would but seek till you find it. But sometimes we are in distress, as Christian and Hopeful were in Doubting Castle, and we have to say, as Christian did, “What a fool am I to lie rotting in this stinking dungeon when I have a key in my bosom that I am persuaded would open every lock in Doubting Castle!”

Search out the promises, then, and go before God with a distinct answer to the question, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” “Lord, I would have that promise fulfilled, or that grace bestowed, or that need supplied, or that sin forgiven.”

So, dear friends, in intercessory prayer, it is very necessary, I think, in order to keep up our own interest in it, that we should have distinct objectives. I do not find that I can pray for all mankind anything like so fervently as I can pray for my own children. I do not find that I can pray for the nation as well as I can for London. When I pray for London, I seek to do it earnestly. It behooves us to pray for all men, according to Scripture. All sorts of men are to be included in our supplications. I must, however, confess that I am most fervent in prayer when I pray for this congregation, and that because I have the most vivid thought of this people, and the clearest idea of their present requirements.

If you want to pray for any particular person, or any special objective, the better you understand the case you have in hand, the warmer and livelier your pleading will be. There are people in this chapel who have asked me to pray for them. Well, I have tried to do so, and I hope the Lord heard my prayer. But since I have known more of them, and found out where they live, and who they were, I can pray for them with more freedom than I could before. They were a sort of abstraction to me once, I have a definite acquaintance with them now.

How easily you remember anything that is tied to something else, or linked by association with a place. Thus you recollect a transaction that occurred to you in the City of London. Every time that you go by the Bank, just at one spot, you say, “I met so-and-so just here the day before he died.” You will never forget it, but you think of it every time you go by. Or perhaps at the corner of a road in the country, just by a hand-post, such-and-such a thing happened to you, and the site of land revokes the

circumstance. Thus we recollect our friends in prayer when we get a knowledge of them, call them up before our mind's eye, and knit, as it were, the secret interests with what we have seen of them when we have talked to them and been interested in their trials.

Some good people have prayed for others by name. Well, you cannot do that if you have a long list, and happen to be a busy man, still, it is good to pray for others by name if you can.

I like those prayers, even in public, in which men do pray for others with some distinctness. Oh! what time we waste when we go beating around the bush! We know individuals who pray for their minister with a circumlocution that distracts the listener. They travel round and round a circle, instead of going at once to the point. A man hardly likes to say, "Lord, save my wife." He prefers talking about "those who are dear to us in the ties of consanguinity, and her who is the partner of our being." Yes, that sounds pretty, very pretty indeed, but would it not be as well if you said at once, "Lord, convert my wife"?

There is one brother here who does pray in that way at the prayer meetings, and who uses those very words. When pleading with God, do let us come straight to the mark, knowing what we at ourselves, and therefore, stating our case plainly in answer to the question, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" May the Lord teach us to pray in this distinct manner!

Time fails us, therefore we will only mention a third point. Our Lord Jesus Christ, in asking this question of the blind man, makes—

III. NO RESERVATION, BUT THROWS OPEN THE PLENITUDE OF HIS HEART, AND THE BOUNDLESSNESS OF HIS POWER.

"What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" is tantamount to saying, "Whatever it is, I will do it, I can do it. Only tell Me what you want." There is no bound to the Savior's ability. Nor does He put a limit on the suppliant's leave to command the favor he desires. It was not then for the blind man to say, "Lord, if You will." He has the opportunity of procuring any boon he solicits. Mark, brethren, it is no question of "can" with regard to Christ, the question is, what do you desire?

Now, sinner, observe the Lord Jesus Christ did not stop to inquire about this man's blindness, whether he had been blind from his birth, or whether he had been affected with a cataract or amaurosis, or any other form of ocular disease. He just said, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" No species of ophthalmia could baffle Him. In any form, or at any stage, it was possible for Him to cure it. The Lord Jesus Christ speaks to you. He says to you today, "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely."

He does not say anything as to whether you have been moral or immoral, whether you have been profane or religious, but simply, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" Your blackest sins will disappear the moment the scarlet of the blood touches them. Your foulest crimes shall melt like snow as soon as the thaw begins. You cannot have sinned yourself beyond the reach of the long arm of Christ, nor can the weight of your sin be too heavy for the back of Christ, the great Sin-bearer, to bear. Whatever your iniquities, though they be red like scarlet, they shall be as wool, though they be as crimson, they shall be whiter than snow.

Some of us would have no hope if we did not know that Christ will save the chief of sinners. We should long since have sunk into remorse and despair if we had not seen it written in letters of gold, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." You know John Bunyan's hint about that text. He said, "Who is this man? Who is this, 'him that cometh'? Why, any 'him that cometh' in all the world, be he who he may, he will in no wise, under no pretext, for no reason, and in no way, ever cast out." If you come to Christ, He will keep His word. He cannot be a liar. He must be as good as His own declaration. If you come to Him, He will not cast you out! What wilt thou that He should do unto thee?

Oh! believer, have you a desire upon your soul, have you a longing in your heart, then Christ does not say that He will give you this mercy, if it be possible, but He is able to do for you exceeding abundantly above what you ask or even think.

I hear that text still quoted by some of my brethren, “Above all that we can ask or even think.” I beg their pardon, that is not a faithful quotation of Scripture. It says, “Above all that we ask or think”—above all that we *do* ask! God can open a man’s mouth as wide as His mercies, and He can make us ask for anything, but He generally does for us above all that we ask or think.

Never keep your mouth closed because you think the mercy to be too great. “He that spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also, with him, freely give us all things?” Do not stint yourself! Enlarge your desire. Open your mouth wide and He will fill it. He gives you *carte blanche*, sue for what you will. He puts it before you, “Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He will give thee the desire of thy heart.” So may it be to us, according to our faith, and His shall be the glory. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

LUKE 13:10-23

Verses 10-12. *And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath, and, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her,—*

With that quick eye of His which was always in sympathy with His audience.

12-14. *He called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people,—*

In what a cold-blooded, heartless manner he must have said it, you may well imagine. For a man not to rejoice when he saw his poor fellow creature thus healed, shows that he must have been destitute of much milk of human kindness, and that bigotry had dried up his soul.

14. *There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, but not on the sabbath day.*

He did not dare to speak to Christ. I suppose the majesty of Christ’s manner overawed him, so he struck at the people directly, and at Christ through them. Now our Lord did not go sideways to work when He replied to him.

15-17. *The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.*

The Jews had reduced the Sabbath to a day of idleness and luxury. The only thing they forbade themselves was the doing of anything. Now the Sabbath was never intended to be spent in idleness and luxury. It should be spent in the worship of God, and works of mercy and works of piety make the Sabbath day holy, instead of being contrary to its demands. And our Savior, by giving rest to that poor burdened woman, was in truth, making Sabbath in her body and in her soul.

18-19. *Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.*

A little grace grows and becomes great grace. If you have at present but little faith, be thankful for that little. Bring it to Christ, let it feed upon Him, and your mustard seed will grow till it becomes a tree. The same is true of the Gospel throughout the world. We need never be afraid because we happen to be few in number. If we have got the truth, the truth will live, and if the truth be as the mustard seed, there

is life in it—vitality in it, and it is sure to grow ere long. We must not be afraid to be in the minority. Majorities are not always right. Are they ever? Perhaps sometimes.

20-21. *And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

Some read this as a parable to set forth the power of evil, and I do not doubt that it does set it forth. At the same time it sets forth the power of good too, for it is put side by side with the other as the likeness of the kingdom of God. And truth in the soul does work, and ferment, and permeate the entire nature, if it be placed there.

22-23. *And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?*

That is a question that I have heard a great many times. What is the fascination that makes men so fond of asking it? I do think that some ask it as if they almost hoped that there would be few. If they do not go to our Ebenezer or Rehoboth, what can become of them? Surely you cannot expect that there should be any good come to those that do not frequent Salem and Enod. What must they hope? In that spirit the question is often asked, but brethren, may God lift us up above that spirit, and make us desire that there should be multitudes saved. I suppose that one of the surprises of heaven will be to see vastly many more there than we ever dreamt would reach that place. Jesus Christ gave a very practical answer. It was no answer, and yet was the best of answers.

23. *And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

Make a push for it, agonize for it, for many will seek—not strive, but merely seek. Or to put another meaning into it, strive now to enter in at the strait gate, for many will be unable, when it is too late, and that, doubtless, is the sense of the passage.

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.