

A LIFE THAT LIFTS

Acts 10:38

"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

For a time Cornelius, a Roman centurion, saw the way of Christ very dimly, if he saw it at all. God was pleased to tell him to send for Simon Peter, who would show him the way of God more perfectly, and tell him the things that he needed to know in order to become acquainted with the Christian way of life.

When Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, other anxious inquirers were there also. Deeply impressed by his great responsibility and challenged by his tremendous opportunity, Peter immediately and pointedly preached Christ to them. He summarized the earthly activities of the Lord Jesus in the brief statement He "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." Peter's message on the death, burial and resurrection of Christ was accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit to such a degree that the entire group received Christ as Saviour and enlisted in His service.

Peter declared that the chief purpose of Christ coming into the world was to die in order that men, women, boys and girls might be saved. He also made much of the fact that, while the Saviour was on earth and awaiting death, He went from place to place doing good and helping others to a higher and better plane of life. To Peter the most impressive thing about the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ was the intensity and the benevolence of His service.

It is interesting to note that Christ did not go about making a show or boasting of His faithfulness in observing religious rites, as did the Pharisees; or parading military prowess and manly strength, as did the Romans; or displaying worldly wit and wisdom, as did the Greeks; but rather in doing good to the bodies, the minds and the souls of men.

Neither did Christ go about defending Himself. He never felt any need of defending His character when people defamed it. He did not waste His time defending His reputation when they circulated lies about Him. Instead, He filled His days to overflowing with deeds of helpfulness to those who were in distress, in the grip of some dread disease, or under the control of demons. In pursuing that course, our Lord has given to every Christian one of the most important and valuable lessons to be learned, namely, that a godly life does not need any defender or defense.

Our Lord never went about boasting of the good He had done. Frequently, when He healed somebody, He said, "Tell no man." How scant are the records of His good deeds! They are contained, for the most part, in the account of His thirty-five miracles. This fact should teach all of us that it is much better to do good than it is to brag about what we have done.

When we hear of any great man we naturally want to know how he lived and what he did. But, when compared with Christ Jesus, all other great men are only like stars when compared with the sun. Let me point out to you a typical day in the ministry of our Lord, which will demonstrate the truth that He "went about doing good." On that particular morning our Lord arrived in Capernaum, and the neighbors came into the house to welcome Him back. A paralytic was let down through the roof by four of his friends, and laid at the feet of Christ. Looking mercifully upon him, the Lord said, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." On hearing this, some protested saying, "None can forgive sins but God only." Christ immediately gave proof of His authority by healing the paralytic, who left the Saviour's presence with a saved soul and a healed body.

Later in the day, Levi, the tax-collector, whom Jesus had called to be one of His disciples, gave a party in honor of the Lord. While the festivities were in progress, suddenly there burst in the ruler of the synagogue. Jairus had come because his twelve year old daughter was lying at death's door. On hearing of the father's intense anxiety, our Lord at once left the party and set out with him toward his home. While making the journey, they encountered a woman suffering from a chronic disease. All her sayings had been spent in trying a number of proposed remedies, but she had not derived any benefit from them. With a trembling finger the poor sufferer touched the Master's robe. When her story had been told, He sent her away with the blessing of salvation and healing, and the assuring words: "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Knowing how dangerously ill his child was, Jairus must have been terribly impatient at this delay. When they arrived at his home, the wailing of the hired mourners told him that his child had passed away. But Christ quietly said: "She is not dead, but asleep." Entering the death-chamber He took her by the hand and said, "Talitha cumi," meaning, in the language of the mothers of the East in waking their little ones, "Waken up, my wee lamb." At these words the child was restored to her parents.

No sooner had the Lord gone out into the road again than two blind men attracted His attention. They cried, "Jesus, Thou son of David, have mercy upon us." Their appeal was granted, and the priceless benefit of sight was bestowed upon them. Our Lord's works of mercy for that one day, however, were not yet ended. Ere He slept that night He commanded a demon to come out of one who had been possessed, and thereafter the unfortunate fellow had a calm and balanced mind. What a wonderful record, and all of it took place within a single day! That day's work was typical of many others in the life of our Lord.

It is truly amazing that the entire biography of the greatest life this world has ever seen is contained in a single and brief sentence—"He went about doing good." What a simple and undramatic thing to do, just what anyone might have done, but what nobody else ever has done all the time. Wherever Christ went on earth He left behind Him some abiding good, someone who was better because of His contact or visit. Wherever He went someone was healed of a debilitating weakness or a distressing wound, or some ray of undying light was kindled in the hearts and home of people. He just "went about doing good," and in doing so left us an example that we should follow.

Even though men marvelled greatly at the gracious words which proceeded from the mouth of Him of Whom it was said, "Never man spake like this Man," it was quite evident that it was not His words which impressed Peter the most. What Peter's memory grasped, retained and transformed into a radiant ideal was the sheer goodness and absolute consistency of our Lord. Looking back over the wonderful and never-to-be-forgotten years that he and his associates had companied with the Lord, Peter rejoiced in the unfading consciousness that he had been with One Who had lived only to do good. He remembered his Lord not merely as being good beyond all dreams of mortal purity and excellence, but as actively doing good; not merely as One Who was self-contained, but Who was always self-communicating; as having a strangely persuasive holiness which spent itself in the ministrations of unwearied compassion for the unholy.

Our text shows us how much can be wrapped up and expressed in a single sentence. The life of Christ was all being, doing and giving. He did not go about becoming good, or in getting good, but in dispensing good. He did good because He was good. His goodness was the natural outflowing of His heart of love, which was pure and free. He did good because His boundless compassion and tender pity moved Him. Christ spent His life in doing good within the sphere in which He lived, and to those within His reach. Thus He has taught us that, instead of consuming our time in wanting to do good where we cannot, we should do good where we can. We should do all the good we can in all the ways we can as long as we possibly can. Not a day passes but what other people stand in our

presence with their needs, appealing to us for some service which we may render to them.

A life that lifts cannot be one of ease and selfish enjoyment. To become useful and helpful one must die to self and personal ambition. It is entirely possible for one to live for self, not make any personal sacrifices, and have a keen eye always for his own interests and advancement, but there is another and far better way to live. That way is to forget self and be obedient to God in the giving of self in the service of others. There are those who will say that we are foolish to give ourselves in toiling for others who do not appreciate what we do for them. They said as much about Christ Jesus when they tried to keep Him from going to the cross, but we know that He did not make a mistake in choosing the way of sacrifice.

We are told that when Cook, the great navigator, made his circumnavigation of the globe, he took with him a vast quantity of the seeds of English flowers. He had these made up into little packets and wherever the vessel landed, the boatmen noticed Cook with a number of these little packets, searching out places that gave promise of fertility and scattering these seeds, gathered in the far-off English gardens. In that way he belted the world with English flowers. Many of those seed reproduced, and years later navigators were surprised to find English flowers growing where they never dreamed of seeing them. In some such manner, Jesus went about doing good. He carried the seeds of heavenly flowers with Him in His speech, in the spirit of His life, in everything He said or did, and they took root and grew up in strange places, but always breathing the same divine fragrance and beauty.

Doing the will of God was the ultimate purpose of Christ. In George Macdonald's novel we read of Robert Falconer who, after his long struggle and great dissatisfaction with the emptiness of his life, went to his box and took out the copy of the New Testament that his mother had given him before he left home, and said, "Now I must find standing ground." He proceeded to read about the life and words of Christ, with a slip of paper by his side, intending to write down the fundamental principles of the Master's life and teachings.

One principle that he recorded was this, "That a man's business is to do the will of God." There are those who deny this principle with their lips, and there are others who deny it with their lives. A second principle was, "That God takes upon Himself the care of the man who makes it his business to do the will of God." The third principle was, "Therefore, a man must never be afraid of anything." As long as we are engaged in doing the will of God we need not be afraid.

Two things should be said about our Lord Jesus "who went about doing good." The first is that He was anointed with power, and the second is that God was with Him. If we follow in His steps, we, too, shall receive power from God and be aware of God's presence with us. God is always with those who do His will.

The words of our text, summarizing the earthly life of our Lord, suggest to us the positive character of His life. He was not a hermit. He was not a stay-at-home. He never lived apart from His fellows. He mingled with people and did His best to help them. He was goodness in action, reinforced with feet, arms, hands, eyes and a tongue. He went about seeking for opportunities to do good. He died young, but He did a lot of good while He lived. He went to those who would not or could not come to Him in order that they might be blessed.

In ministering to the bodies of men Christ fed the hungry, opened the eyes of the blind, enabled the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak and the lame to walk, cleansed the lepers, cast out demons and healed all kinds of diseases. In ministering to the minds of men

Christ gave instruction on subjects of vital importance, removed prejudices, corrected those who had erroneous ideas, taught men their duties and urged them to do them. In ministering to the souls of men, Christ preached glad tidings to those who needed to hear them, forgave the sins of those who repented, saved those who believed on Him and proclaimed liberty to the captives.

Going about doing good was the habit of Christ's life. He was always saying kind things and doing kind deeds. He never retired from doing good. People were blessed by His presence. His look, His smile and His words cheered and encouraged those with whom He dealt. While hanging on the cross He prayed for His enemies and saved the penitent robber.

Of course, we cannot do many of the great things that Christ did. They are outside of the purpose and will of God for us. But, there is a sense in which there is to be the closest identification between what he did and what we do. Even though we cannot do many of the great things which Christ did, we can do many little things in the same spirit that He did.

A life spent in honoring Christ and helping others will be the best investment possible for anyone. Going about doing good is one thing in which all Christians can participate, if they will. In going about doing good, through service to humanity, we shall never find any limitations on our opportunities. From this service of doing good there is not to be any retirement in this life. Our world is certainly famishing for those who will take time out from their own interest and go out on a mission of doing good in the name of Christ and for the sake of others.