

A LIFE THAT LIFTS

"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.

Cornelius, the Roman centurion, sent for Simon Peter to come and instruct him in the Christian faith. When Peter arrived at his house in Caesarea several 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, summarizing 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." The Apostle'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.

It was quite clear that Peter recognized, acknowledged and declared that the chief purpose of Christ's 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 living. To Peter the most impressive thing about the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ was the intensity and the benevolence of His service. Concerning this Peter knew whereof he spoke because he went about with Him as His companion and disciple.

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 doing good to the bodies, the minds and the souls of men.

Neither did our Lord 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.

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 homes 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.

Peter had observed Christ at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, as well as in homes where anxiety and fear reigned or to which death had come and brought deep sorrow. He had known and observed Christ in the impartiality of His friendship, in the depth and amazing width of His compassion, in the strength of His sympathy, in the limitlessness of His unselfishness, and in the availability of His ready and adequate assistance. Of his blessed Lord, to Whom he had committed himself, Peter said, "He went about doing good." Christ did not go about becoming good or getting good, but in dispensing good. His doing good was the outflowing of His heart in love. He did good at all times, in all places and under all circumstances.

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. 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. On all sides the lives of others touch ours, so we cannot do just as we please, thinking only of ourselves and our comforts, unless we choose to be false to all the instincts of humanity, and all the requirements of the law of Christian love. We must think of other people. We begin to be like Christ when we have that intense desire to be helpful. When this desire is dominant, the life is an unceasing benediction. The secret of abundant helpfulness is found in the desire to be a blessing to all we meet.

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.

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.

Our Lord came to reveal God to men, and then to show them what they ought to be and to do. He went about doing good. He spent so much of His time in doing kind things for people, things to make them better, happier and more useful. Of course, we cannot do many of the great things that He did, such as exercising superhuman power. Obviously there are many of His footsteps that we can never trace. For instance, we can never perform miracles as He did. We can never follow His footsteps into the path of His own unique sacrifice for the sins of the world. These are outside of the purpose and will of God for us, as well as of the necessities and possibilities of the case. 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 demonstrated.

A life spent in honoring Christ and helping others will be the best investment possible for anyone. This is one phase of the Christian life in which all can engage. All can follow in the steps of our Lord by going about doing good. In service to humanity all who will may enter and find no limitations on the opportunities. To do good should be the object of every Christian. From this service there is not to be any retirement. Our world is famishing for people who will take time from their own interests and go out on a mission of doing good in the name of Christ and for the good of others.