

BRINGING LIGHT TO OTHERS' FACES

"May the Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain." II Timothy 1:16.

Some years ago a boy living on an isolated farm in Wisconsin was taken dangerously ill. A man with a team of horses was sent to get the nearest doctor as soon as possible. When the doctor arrived he was taken to the room where the sick boy lay. Anxiously the father and mother awaited his decision. In that room there was another person who was greatly distressed. He was the brother of the sick boy, a little fellow who hid behind the furniture and looked on.

After examining the sick boy and giving him some medicine, the doctor turned to the father and mother and said, "Have no fear, he is going to get well." The little fellow behind the furniture could not see the doctor, but he could see the faces of his parents, and he never forgot the flood of light that came into their faces when the doctor said, "Have no fear, he is going to get well." The boy felt that he could worship the man who brought such relief to his parents, and he resolved that when he became a man he would do things which would bring light to people's faces.

That lad fulfilled those resolutions for he became the famous Doctor Rosenow of the Mayo Clinic, one of the greatest bacteriologists of modern times. His contribution to the cure of infantile paralysis, as well as various other contributions which he has made to the science of medicine, has brought light into the faces of thousands of people.

It is quite interesting to study the men of the Bible whose names are only briefly mentioned, sometimes but a very short sentence, but how significant in every case. Like a wave upon the sea, they rise but for a moment, and then sink back forever into the indistinguishable waters. They always linger long enough, however, to teach us some helpful lesson.

In Paul's second letter to Timothy, which was written during his second imprisonment and not long before his death, Paul refers to a man otherwise unknown. His name was Onesiphorus, which means "profit bringer" or "bringer of help." Our text indicates that his life was true to his name. He brought profit to God, to others, and to himself.

Onesiphorus was a citizen of Ephesus. Some years before, when Paul was conducting a soul-winning campaign in Ephesus he made his acquaintance. Paul won him to Christ. He became an earnest and faithful worker in the church. From Paul he learned the most that he knew about Christ and the Christian life. He became a fellow-worker and an unswervingly loyal friend to Paul. His home was always open to Paul. His family was always glad when Paul came on a visit. How Onesiphorus earned his living we are not told. Whatever he did for a living, it was only a sideline with him. His real vocation was bringing light to people's faces. He was constantly refreshing people and bracing them up. He brought consolation, cheer, and courage to the cheerless and depressed. He worked at it so persistently that it became the habit of his life.

Meanwhile, Paul had been bound with chains and imprisoned in a Roman dungeon. Onesiphorus made his way to Rome, perhaps on business of some sort, but more likely on purpose to visit Paul. He resolved to see his friend. Although it was not an easy task, he succeeded in getting permission to interview Paul. He was ushered to Paul's cell, and the two greeted each other warmly. Paul was depressed because he had just been thinking about those who had deserted him, about the fact that winter was coming on and he did not have a cloak, and that death was staring him in the face.

I can see Onesiphorus as he sat down on the cold stones of that cell and talked with Paul. We do not know what they said to each other. They may have discussed their own personal experiences of saving grace. They may have discussed their past victories. They may have discussed the future of the growing church at Ephesus, from whose members he brought tidings of their love for Paul. They may have prayed together. But whatever the nature of their conversation, it brought new courage and fresh hope to Paul. It put new light in his face. When the visitor went away he left a revived and strengthened Paul, a different man from the one he found, one who had been braced up and had a new light in his face. He had refreshed Paul with his consolation, fellowship and kindness.

This story is but a typical page out of the biography of this good man. It is the picture of the kind of visits he made time and again.

I. How Did Onesiphorus Put New Light Into Paul's Face?

1. He went to see him.

Paying him a visit was a very simple matter. It did not require genius to do that. It did not require culture to do that. It did require courage and a loving heart. Onesiphorus placed loyalty to a friend above convenience and personal pride. He would not go back on a friend when disaster, disgrace and death came to him. He took pains to help his friend. He brought new light into his face. Only Paul knew how much this kindness meant to him. "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

2. He sympathized with him.

He did not necessarily tell Paul that he sympathized with him. He did not have to. The fact that he was there showed that he cared. Paul could see that his friend was under the load with him, and through that sympathy he was encouraged, cheered and refreshed.

Sympathy can be defined as "two hearts tugging at one load." Real sympathy always lightens the load of those who carry burdens. There are times when all need it. Even Jesus hungered intensely for human sympathy. Many have gone out into the dark for the lack of it. A sympathetic friend in adversity is an unspeakable comfort.

3. He convinced him that he was appreciated.

How refreshing is appreciation! How much more smoothly the machinery of the world run if it were only oiled now and then with the beautiful lubricant of appreciation! There is nothing that makes toil more monotonous and dull than for one to feel that the thing he is doing is not appreciated. We do our work better everywhere when we know we are appreciated. Appreciation goes a long way in keeping romance alive in the home. It makes the hands of the physician and nurse more tender and skillful. It makes the toiler in every department of life more willing and more efficient. Appreciation is something that enriches both him that gives and him that receives. It is something that the more we express it the more abundantly we possess it. It is as refreshing as bread to the hungry and as water to the thirsty.

Far too many fail to be helpful in bringing light to others' faces, not because they do not mean to do so, but because they are always too late. Paul was a prisoner in Rome, and the sentence of death was hanging over him. Suppose Onesiphorus had waited several days and some weeks as most people do, to show his love for this friend.

One day he might have heard that Paul, whom he had loved so dearly for what he had done for him, had been beheaded. Then Onesiphorus would have stated that he had intended to cheer and help Paul, but it was forever too late then. This is one of our serious troubles in Christian service -- we are too late. But Onesiphorus performed his ministry of helpfulness in time.

II. Why Should We Bring Light to Others' Faces?

1. It was the practices of our Saviour.

As He went about doing good, He was constantly busy putting light into others' faces. Lazarus was dead. Mary and Martha were sad. The voice of Jesus called Lazarus from the grave. What a light that must have brought to the faces of Mary and Martha! The only son of a poor widow in Nain was dead. Jesus stopped his funeral procession and brought him back to life. When he changed that procession of tears into one of rejoicing, and of heartbreak into one of happiness, it put a new light into the face of that poor widow and mother. A certain lame man was a cripple from his birth. Jesus healed him and he went away praising God. What a light the Master put into the face of that man!

That was what Jesus did all the days of His life here on the earth. He went about bringing light into the faces of others. That is what He is doing today. That is what He will do tomorrow. Wise, therefore, is any person who follows the example of the Saviour in this all important task.

2. It needs to be done.

This world is full of people who are baffled and defected, and they need someone who can put the light back into their faces. Many are finding this world more a place of tears than of laughter, and they need someone who can change their sobs into songs. Many are finding this world a place of darkness instead of light and they need someone who can cause the sun to rise again.

At sometime or another everybody needs to have the light brought back to his face. We all know that Paul was a man of great courage, great faith, and wonderful intimacy with God. He had refreshed others and brought the light back into their faces throughout his tireless ministry. Now if this great man of God needed someone to brace him up, and put the light back into his face, it is not to be wondered that there are multitudes in the world who need it today. If others need their strength renewed, their faith quickened, and their hearts gladdened with the hope of victory, then we, who are God's children, are the ones to do these things for them.

And the glorious thing about this task is that we can work at it anywhere-- in the most obscure or the most public place, in the country or in the city, in the home or away from home. Anywhere and anytime you can bring light to others' faces.

3. It is so beneficial.

We have no way of estimating the amount of good we can do for others by bringing help to them which will result in a new light in their face.

Neither can we imagine how beneficial to ourselves is this all-important work of bringing light to the faces of others. By bringing light to the faces of others we put a greater light in our own faces. I submit for your consideration the following statement from Dr. Frank Crane, namely, "Happiness always comes to you over your shoulder, and it comes most permanently and regularly to those who are trying to make other people happy. Just help someone, give a word of appreciation

to some sensitive boy or girl, cheer up a discouraged worker, amuse a child, and the first thing you know happiness will start up behind you and have her arms about your neck."

The heart of our Saviour was the happiest one that ever beat within a breast, and the face of Jesus was the sunniest one that ever looked out on the world.

We can devote ourselves to the task of bringing light to our own faces but we shall be disappointed. On the other hand, we can spend ourselves in trying to bring light to the faces of others, and we shall make glad discoveries. Let us seek out opportunities to bring light into others' faces. What Onesiphorus did, any of us can do. God grant that His mantle may fall on us. The night is fast approaching when no man can work. Therefore do the good that your hands find to do, and do it today.