

ON DOING GOOD

Acts 10:34-38

Peter's visit to the house of Cornelius to preach the Gospel of Christ to a group of Gentiles is one of the earliest outbursts of the missionary passion that is seen in the Christian movement. It was a master stroke at the barriers which separate men. It magnified the central truth of the teachings of Christ, that God is no respecter of persons.

When Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, there was a house full of anxious inquirers. What preacher can be placed in such a situation without feeling a sense of responsibility and of opportunity? Times have changed to such an extent that one seldom finds such an occasion now. There are so many distractions to take the people away from church, and to divert their minds from Christianity.

What use did Peter make of his opportunity? Some ministers lose their opportunity; they spend the time trying to amuse and to entertain the people; some waste the time theorizing about some unimportant question; and others spend the time giving book reviews. What a tragedy for a minister to lose golden opportunities of preaching the Word of God.

My subject is a phrase taken from the sermon which Peter preached to Cornelius and his friends at Caesarea when the door of the church was opened to the Gentiles. On the human side these words form a marvelous epitome of the life of Jesus. They give us a vivid picture of the life of our blessed Lord. The simplest minds can understand something of their enfolded beauty, but even the greatest minds cannot exhaust their meaning.

When we hear of any great man, we always want to know how he lived and what he did. But you may put all great men together, and, compared with Jesus, they are only like stars compared with the sun. And our text informs us that Jesus "went about doing good." Christ went about, not like a Pharisee, to make a show and boast of religious rites and observances; not like the Romans, to parade military prowess and manly strength; not like the Greeks, to display worldly wit and wisdom; but to do good to the bodies and to the souls of men.

The chief purpose of Christ's coming into the world was to die that people might be saved, but His death did not occur until He was beyond thirty-three years of age. While He was waiting for the time when He should die, He took advantage of the opportunity and spent the intervening years in helping humanity to a better plane of living, lifting their burdens, carrying their sorrows in His heart, healing their diseases, rebuking their sins, and setting them an example by which they might pattern their own lives to get the most out of life, and give life a new interpretation.

Jesus did not go about defending Himself. This would have been the natural thing, the human thing, for Him to have done. When lies are circulated about us, we usually set about at once to establish our innocence. But Jesus felt no need of defending His character; He lost no time in trying to take care of His good name, but filled the days with deeds of helpfulness to those who were in distress, in the grip of disease, or in the power of evil spirits. In pursuing such a course Christ gave the world one of its most valuable lessons, that a life such as He lived needs no defenders.

Neither did Christ go about boasting of the good He did, but often when He healed one He said, "Tell no man." How scant are the records of His good deeds! The story of only thirty-five miracles--the healing of only fifteen sick ones and of fifteen lepers, and the raising of three dead people--largely sums up the good deeds that are recorded. This silence was eloquent with meaning. And its message is that it is better to do the good than to brag about it. Christ was too busy helping the sick, healing the diseased, comforting the broken-hearted, and lifting the fallen, to give time to record-making. He

emphasized the fact that it is as important to be sound in life as it is to be sound in doctrine. Orthodoxy of creed is exceedingly important, but so is orthodoxy of life.

Our text shows us how much may be wrapped up and expressed in a few words, even in a single sentence. The life of Christ was all being and 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. It was pure, and free. He did good to all, at all times, and under all circumstances. He did good because His boundless compassion and tender pity moved Him. His benevolence was shown to the poor and needy. He preached the gospel to the poor, was a friend of publicans and sinners, gathered disciples to be with Him from among the common people, and showed that He loved man as man, and was no respecter of persons. The benevolent acts He performed for the bodies of men were symbols and types of what He could and would do for the minds and souls of men.

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.

However, the life that is to be a beneficent one cannot be one of ease and selfish enjoyment. To become useful and helpful we must die to self and personal ambition. One may live for self, take good care of himself, not make any personal sacrifices, and have a keen eye always for his own interests and advancement. But there is another and better way to live. It is to forget self, and to obey God by giving self in the service of others. People will say that we are foolish to sacrifice and to give ourselves in toiling for others who are not worthy and do not appreciate what we do for them. They said as much about Jesus as they tried to keep Him from going to the cross, but we know that He did not make a mistake when He chose 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.

Jesus Christ came into the world to reveal God to man, to redeem man from sin, and to reconcile man to God. He came cheerfully to do the will of God, and to provide eternal life for man. He also came to show us what men ought to be and what they ought to do. He found this world lost, and He came to save those who were in it; He found the world benighted, and He came to illumine it; He found it corrupt, and He came to purify it; He found it fallen, and He came to elevate it; He found it wretched, and He came to bless it; He found it enslaved, and He came to emancipate it.

The words of our text, which summarize the life of our Lord, suggest to us the positive

character of His life. Jesus Christ was not a hermit saint. He was no stay-at-home. His idea of the religious life was not to live apart from His fellows. He mingled with people and did His best to help them. He was goodness in action. He was goodness reinforced with arms, feet, hands, eyes, and a tongue. He went about seeking for opportunities to do good. In all His wonderful career, He went about doing good. He died young, but He lived long, because life consists in action. The grand thing is that He did good while He lived. He did good with His own hands; not by proxy. Many of His benevolent acts were unsolicited by men. He went to those who would not and could not come to Him in order that they might be blessed.

1. He did good to the bodies of men.

He fed the hungry multitudes. He opened the eyes of the blind; He enabled the lame to walk; He enabled the dumb to speak; He cleansed the lepers; He cast out demons; He healed all kinds of diseases--in fact, none applied to Him in vain or were sent away from Him unrelieved; and He raised the dead.

2. He did good to the minds of men.

He gave instruction to the ignorant on subjects of vital importance. He removed prejudices and corrected mistakes. He reproved the guilty and warned the careless in order that they might repent and believe and be saved. His words brought peace, comfort, and hope to many. He taught men their duties and urged them to do them.

3. He did good to the souls of men.

He preached glad tidings to the meek, bound up the brokenhearted, and proclaimed liberty to the captives. He forgave sins and saved sinners.

Jesus persevered in doing good. He did not go about doing good just in His spare time. It was the habit of His life. It was His constant business; and He was never weary of it. He was always saying kind things and doing kind deeds. There was no retirement from doing good so far as He was concerned. Even when He hung on the cross, He prayed for His enemies, and saved the penitent thief. Ever and always His emphasis was upon doing good. Therefore, people, felt better when He was near. His presence, His look, and His smile blessed and cheered and encouraged. So, it behooves us, in seeking to do good in the name of Him who has left us an example, to follow in His steps. If we will only follow His example in doing good as we go through life, we will be making the best possible investment of our lives.

And this is one phase of the Christian life all can engage in. Not all can be preachers, or singers, or leaders of great movements; but all can go about doing good and helping others. Christ alone can bring salvation to any person; but in service to humanity, and in joy and happiness, and in scattering helpfulness and blessings in the world, all who will may enter and find no limitations on the opportunity. 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.