

THE MASTER MENDER

"And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them." Matthew 4:21.

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." I Peter 5:10.

That torn fisherman's net on which James and John were working was a dramatic symbol of the personal disorganization and disrepair that Christ wanted to correct in their lives. He was sure that He could do as fine a work on them as they were doing on that net.

Can you name any sadder symptom of our generation than the lack of wholeness, unity and purposefulness by which so many lives are marked? One thoughtful young man said, "I feel like a lot of pieces of people thrown together." He implied that he was not a whole, healthy person, but just fragments of personality tossed together without any unifying force or meaning.

It is that sort of mood that fills hospital beds with the victims of mental illness in all of its many grades and shades. Many of those whom it does not send to hospitals, it reduces to the level where life is neither happy nor effectual.

Look now, if you will, at this picture offered to us in the scriptures that are before us. Peter had just answered the Master's call to leave all and follow Him. Now comes the call to James and John on a sun-drenched morning in Galilee when they were busy "mending their nets."

We have seen fishermen mending their nets on the seashore. With a patience and a skill that we might have envied, we have watched them as they were busy at their task. Their bronzed faces and their strong and vigorous frames tell of many years spent upon the briny deep. We can visualize them handling their boats magnificently when the wind was freshening into angry storms. But now, in the quiet of the morning, when the waves were idly lapping on the beach, they were busy mending their nets. It was thus that James and John were busy when they received the call that changed their lives. Their boat was rocking in the shallow water, and they were chatting while they worked. Then came Christ and claimed them for Himself and called them into the service of discipleship, whereupon they left everything and followed Him.

How are nets usually broken? Sometimes they are broken by the ordinary wear and tear of fishing. They get worn out here, and they get worn out there, through the rough handling. There is no reason to suspect that they were bad nets. They may have been purchased from the finest maker. There are points where the net is very apt to break, but it is not always there the breakage happens. Sometimes in the least expected quarter a rent appears. So, in these lives of ours there is often a breaking down through wear and tear, and sometimes the breaking is at the very point where you and I might never have expected it.

Our second text is taken from the letter of the well-seasoned, apostle Peter to his widely scattered Christian friends. He wanted them to know that the God who had so mightily revealed Himself in Christ was able to do with torn lives what he and others, in the old fishing days, had done with faulty nets. He was able to mend them. So, using exactly the same word as is translated "mending" in Matthew, Peter says in substance, "O brethren, this God whom we have seen in Christ Jesus, whatever He does, He will mend your broken nets, will bring wholeness and effectiveness into your lives and will give healing to your torn hearts!" Behold then, this Christ of ours, as the Master Mender! See how desperately His services are needed.

I. Christ Is The Mender Of Lives Torn By Sin.

Many lives will never be put in repair except by the skilled hand of a master mender. When you read these two epistles that bear Peter's name, you are not wrong if you look for touches that are autobiographical. Peter's own experience keeps coming out like ink that stains through a page.

Those who go by old traditions that have come down to us, as Lloyd Douglas does in The Big Fisherman, see the young man Peter as a large, strapping fellow who was pretty much a swaggering rascal. The "big fisherman" in those days was actually the big noise behind which was a thoroughly defeated life. Know this, that when the evil that is working in a person's life is rampant, disorderly and loud, it is the unmistakable sign of a deep emptiness and a torturing defeat within.

The predominating idea in I Peter 5:10 is that of adjustment, the putting of parts into right relationship and connection. The word here refers to the Lord mending the lives of Christians, thus equipping them for usefulness in His service. Peter here speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit in rounding out the spiritual life of the child of God so that he is equipped for both the living of a Christian life and the service of Christ. It is that great work of divine grace by which our defects are made good, the rents which sin has made are mended, the tarnished purity given back and the scars effaced.

Henry F. Milans, the New York newspaper man whose life had been frayed to shreds by drink and then mended by Christ, told the story of a young woman in her twenties who was one of the toughest characters that the men of the Oak Street police station had to handle, and "Nellie" they had to handle frequently. She was the promiscuous consort of sailors, river pirates and other disreputable characters. When she was drunk and full of obscenities and profanities, no one policeman on the beat could manage her. But, one night a Salvation Army lassie, with a love and understanding that "Nellie" could not resist, led her to Christ in the confession of her faith and the surrender of her tattered, bedraggled self. The broken pieces of her life were put together. But, instead of having nothing to do with the police, she began to have more dealings than ever with them. With their help, she began luring girls of the kind she had been from their old haunts and habits into a new life in Christ.

Milans testifies that the last time he saw Nellie Conway alive she was walking into a meeting on the Bowery bringing with her seven girls of the streets. He said that the prayer she later offered for the salvation of those girls was the most moving prayer he ever heard from human lips. When she died, she had an escort to her grave made up of police officers, city officials and numerous Christian workers. The Master Mender had taken the terribly torn net of her wretched twisted life and had woven it into a fabric whose utility was as marked as its beauty.

What is the sin that has produced its shattering effect within your character? Whatever it is, there is a Master Mender, Who once took hold of the wood on which they crucified Him and turned it into a throne, Who now stands ready to take your case if you will just turn it over entirely to Him. He will mend what is wrong by making you right.

II. Christ Is The Mender Of Lives Torn By Trouble.

Peter knew such persons. He had met many of them. He was, in fact, writing to them. He wrote of those who "suffer for righteousness' sake" (3:14). He recognized that our brief life-span in this world is more or less at the mercy of pain, for he said, "after that ye have suffered a while" (5:10).

A contemporary author said that, after years of good health, he was thrust into a long, deep valley of ill health. His suffering was intense. He gave it as his testimony, however, that he got nowhere in mastering his suffering until he was willing to accept it.

This is one of the steps for us when we are torn by suffering. All of us tend to reject suffering. We think, in the first place, that it should not be. Then, in the second place, we think, considering my devotion to God, it should not come to me. Christ wants us to take suffering for granted. It will come to each of us sooner or later. Don't be a rebel, for that will only aggravate the mischief.

As a second step in healing us, Christ enables us to affirm that suffering is manageable and useful. The acceptance about which I have just spoken is not at all the same as surrendering to fate or bowing helplessly to the inevitable. It is merely a step that frees the mind of rebellion and pride. Then comes the positive step of believing that out of each ill God can bring some good.

The third thing that Christ does in mending hearts torn by suffering is to take even the worst of it, where no use for it can be discerned, and there bestow the gift of His reinforcing Presence. It was a great encouragement when Christ said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). It was an even greater moment when He said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). "He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds." He is the Master Mender.

III. Christ Is The Mender Of Lives Torn By Inner Conflict.

The best New Testament description of inner conflict perhaps is in Romans seven. The struggle may be gathered up in the words: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (7:19-20).

The cross conquers the self-centeredness of self. It cancels it out and thus removes the source of conflict. It frees the true self by bringing it into love's bondage to Jesus Christ.

Let the God of all grace repair you or mend your life. This He can do now. Then, with the passing of time, He will, as Peter expressed it, "strengthen, stablish, settle you." Don't be a discord; be a tune. Don't be a torn soul; be a whole person.

Christ is the Master Mender, and, by yielding completely to Him, you will discover for yourself that He is.