

“HEAL ME JESUS”

“That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on Earth to forgive sins, then saith He to the sick of the palsy, take up thy bed and go into thine house.” Matthew 9:6.

The great example of our Lord's teaching in the sermon on the mount is followed, in this and the preceding chapter, by a similar collection of His works of healing. They are divided into three groups, each consisting of three members. This miracle is the last of the second triad, of which the other two members are the miraculous stilling of the tempest and the casting out of demons from the men in the country of the Gergesenes.

One may discern a certain analogy in these three members of this central group. In all of them our Lord appears as the Peace-Bringer, but the spheres are different. The calm which was breathed over the stormy lake is peace of a lower kind than that which filled the soul of the demoniacs when the power that made discord within had been cast out. Even that peace was lower in kind than that which brought sweet repose in the assurance of pardon to this poor paralytic. **Forgiveness speaks of a loftier blessing than even the casting out of demons.** The manifestation of power and love steadily rises to a climax.

The most important part of this story, then is not the mere healing of the disease, BUT THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS WHICH ACCOMPANIES IT. And the large teaching which our Lord gives as to the relation between His miracles and His standing work, His ordinary work which He has been doing all through the ages, which He is doing today, **which He is ready to do for you and me if we will let Him,** towers high above the mere miracle, which is honored by being the signal attestation of that work.

Therefore, with that in mind, we turn to our text, not for the sake of dealing with the mere miraculous event, but in order to draw

the important lessons from it which lie upon its very surface.

First thought that is here suggested IS THAT OUR DEEPEST NEED IS FOR FORGIVENESS. How strangely irrelevant and beside the mark, at first sight, seems the answer which Jesus Christ gives to the eager zeal and earnestness of the man and his bearers. Christ's word is “son,” or as the original might more literally and even more graciously be rendered, “Child, be of good cheer. Thy sins be forgiven thee.”

Now that seems far from what they wanted. It was very far from their wish, but yet it was the shortest road to the accomplishment. CHRIST HERE GOES STRAIGHT TO THE HEART OF THE NECESSITY. Because when passing by the disease for the moment, He speaks this great work of pardon.

The palsy was probably the result of the sufferer's vice, and probably too he felt, whatever may have been his “friends” wishes for him, that he needed forgiveness most.

Now such a conclusion as to his state of mind seems a fair inference from our Lord's words to him, for **Jesus Christ would never have offered forgiveness to an indifferent will.** SO WE MAY LEARN THAT OUR CHIEF AND PRIME NEED IS FORGIVENESS. **Amid all our clamors and hungry needs, that is our deepest, is not a man's chief relation in this world his relation to God? Is not that the most important thing about all of us?** If that be wrong, will not everything be wrong? If that be right, will not everything be right? And is it not true that for you and me, and for all mankind, whatever be the surface diversities of character, civilization, culture, taste and the like, there is one deep experience common to every human spirit, and that is the fact, and in some sense more or less acutely the consciousness of the fact, that “we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God?”

There is the frontal source of all sorrow, for even to the most superficial observation 90%, at any rate, of man's misery comes either from his own or from others' wrongdoing, and for the rest, it is regarded in the eye of faith as being sorrow that is needful because of sin, in order to discipline and to purify.

But here stands the fact, that king and clown, philosopher and fool, men of culture and men of ignorance, all of us, through all the ages manifest the unity of our nature in this, I was going to say most chiefly, that lapses from the path of rectitude and indulgence in habits, thoughts, feelings and actions, which even our consciences tell us are wrong, characterize us all.

So we have the profound wisdom of Christ and of His Word in that, when He begins the task of healing, He does not peddle and potter on the surface, but goes straight to the heart, while true instinct flies at the head, like a wise physician pays little heed to secondary and unimportant symptoms, but grapples with disease, makes the tree good, and leaves the good tree to make, as it will, the fruit good.

The first thing to do to heal a man's misery is to make them pure. And the first step in the great method by which a man can be made pure, is to assure him of Divine forgiveness for the past. So the sneers that we often hear about Christian "philanthropists" taking tracts to people when they want soup and the like, are excessively shallow sneers, and indicate nothing more than this, that the critic has superficially diagnosed the disease, and is woefully wrong about the remedy.

We are not knocking any form of beneficence, or to cast doubt upon the purity of motives of helping others, or even to be lacking in admiration for the enthusiasms that fills and guides many an earnest man and woman, working amongst the squalid vice of our great cities and our complex and barbarous civilization today. I recognize all that type of work and probably blessed, **but it only deals with the surface, and you have to get a great deal deeper down than aes-**

thetic or intellectual, or economical or political reformation and changes reach, before you touch the real reason why men and women are miserable in this world.

And you will only effectually cure the misery, but you certainly will do it, when you **begin where the misery begins, and deal first with sin.**

THE "TRUE SAVIOUR OF SOCIETY" is the man that can go to his brother and as an echo of the Divine heart say, "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." And then after that the palsy will go out of the limbs, and a new nervous energy will come into them, and he will rise, "take up his bed and walk."

SECOND, AS COMING OUT OF THIS SAME INCIDENT, THE THOUGHT OF THAT FORGIVENESS IS AN EXCLUSIVELY DIVINE ACT. There was, sitting by, with their jealous and therefore blind eyes, a whole crowd of wise men and religious formalists of the first water, collected together as a kind of ecclesiastical inquisition, and board of triers, as one of the other Gospels tells us, "out of every corner of the land."

They had no care for the compassion which was shown in Christ, or for the nascent hope that began to swim up into the cool, dim eye of the paralytic. But they had kept scent for heresy, and so they fastened with true feline instinct upon the one thing. "This man speaketh blasphemies. Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

If you want to get people blind as bats to the radiant beauty of some lofty character, and insensible as rocks to the wants of a sad humanity, **commend me to your religious formalists, whose religion is mainly a bundle of red tape tied round men's limbs to keep them from getting at things that they would like. And utterly blind to all enthusiasm and to all GRACE.**

BUT YET THE PHARISEES WERE RIGHT, PERFECTLY RIGHT. FORGIVENESS IS AN EXCLUSIVELY DIVINE ACT. ONLY GOD CAN FORGIVE SINS. Of course, because sin has to do with God only,

vice has to do with the laws of morality, crime has to do with the laws of the land. The same act may be vice, crime and sin.

Of course, sin has to do with myself, in the other with my fellow man, in the last with God. **We sin against God.** And so evil considered as sin comes under God's control only, and **only He against whom it has been committed can forgive.**

What is forgiveness? The sweeping aside of penalties? The shutting up of some more or less material hell? By no means. Penalties are often left. When sins are crimes they are generally left, when sins are vices, they are always left, thank God. But in so far as sin is sin, **considered as being the perversion and setting wrong of my relation to God, its consequences, which are its penalties, are swept away by forgiveness.** For forgiveness, in its essence and deepest meaning, is neither more nor less than the love of the person against whom the wrong has been done shall flow out, notwithstanding the wrong. Pardon is love rising above the ice-dam which we have piled in its course, and pouring into our souls.

When fathers and mother forgive their children, what does it mean? Does it not mean that your love is neither deflected nor embittered any more, by reason of their wrongdoing, but pours upon them as of old? So God's forgiveness is at bottom.

"Child," there is nothing in my heart to thee, through which the sun itself has to look like a red ball of lurid fire. But it shines on the upper side of the mists all the same, and all the time, and thins them away and scatters them utterly and shines forth in its own brightness on the rejoicing soul. **Pardon is God's love, unchecked and unembittered, granted to the wrong doer. And that is a Divine act, and a Divine act alone. Only God can forgive sin.**

Pharisees and scribes were perfectly right in this case. No man can forgive sin but God only. Therefore Jesus Christ in forgiving sin is God. And yet even further, God can

forgive sin which people nowadays say is impossible.

The apparent impossibility rises from only the shallow and erroneous notions of what forgiveness God does not. It might be too hard to say God cannot, if we believe in miracles, but as a matter of fact, **God does not usually interfere to hinder men from reaping as regards this life, what they have sown.** But that is not forgiveness, and **is there any reason conceivable why it should be impossible for the Divine love to pour down upon a sinful man, who has confessed his sin, and is trusting in God's mercy in Christ, just as if his sin was non-existent, in so far as it could condition or interfere with the flow of the Divine GRACE? We need a Divine, definitely Divine assurance or pardon.**

If you have ever been down into the cellars of your own soul, and have seen the ugly things that coil there, you will know that a vague trust in a vague God and a vague mercy is not enough to still the conscience that has once been stung into action.

As Christians you want neither priest, nor ceremonies on the one hand, nor a mere peradventure of, "O God, be merciful," on the other, in order to deal with that deepest need of the soul. Nothing but the King's own sin-manual on the pardon makes it valid, and **unless you and I can, somehow or other, come to close grips with God, and get into actual contact with Him, and hear, and somehow with infallible certitude, as from His own lips, the assurance of forgiveness, there is not enough for our needs.**

THE NEXT POINT THAT THE INCIDENT BEFORE US TEACHES US IS THAT JESUS CHRIST CLAIMS AND EXERCISES THIS DIVINE PREROGATIVE OF FORGIVENESS. Mark His answer to these religionists. He admits their promises absolutely. They say, "No man can forgive sins but God only." If Christ was only a man, like me, standing in the relation to the Divine pardon that other teachers, saints, and prophets have stood, and had nothing more to do with it than sim-

ply, as I might do, to say to a troubled soul, "My brother be quite sure that God has forgiven you." If Christ's relation to the Divine forgiveness was nothing more than ministerial and declaratory, why, in the name, not of common sense only, but of veracity, did He not turn around to these men and say so? He was bound by all obligations as a Christian teacher, to disclaim, as you or I would have done under similar circumstances, the misapprehension of His words, "I use blasphemies? No, I am not speaking blasphemies. I know that God only can forgive sins, and I am doing no more than telling my poor brother here that his sins are forgiven by God." But that is not His answer at all.

What He says in effect is "Yes, you are quite right. No man can forgive sins, but God only. I forgive sins." "Whom think ye, then, that I, the son of man, am?" It is easy to say "thy sins be forgiven thee." It is far easier to say that than to say, "Take up thy bed and walk," because one can verify and check the accomplishment of the saying in the one case, and one cannot in the other.

The sentences are equally easy to pronounce, the things are equally difficult for a man to do, but the difference is that one of them can be verified and the other of them cannot. I will do the visible impossibility, and then I have you to judge whether I can do the invisible one or not.

Right in this passage we are brought up to a fork in the road. We know that it is not always a satisfactory way of arguing to compel a man to take one horn or other of an alternative, but it is quite fair to do so in the present case, and I would press it upon some of you who, I think, urgently need to consider the dilemma. Either the Pharisees were quite right, and Jesus Christ the meek, the humble Pattern of all lowly gentleness, the Teacher whom 19 centuries confess that they have not exhausted, was an audacious blasphemer, or He was God manifest in the flesh.

The whole context forbids us to take these words, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," as anything less than the voice of Divine love

wiping out the man's transgressions, and if Jesus Christ pretended or presumed to do that, there is no hypothesis that I know of which can save His character for the reverence of man, but that which sees in Him God revealed in manhood, the world's Judge, from "Go thy way, thy sins are forgiven thee."

AND MORE THAN THAT, JESUS CHRIST HERE IN THIS TEXT BRINGS VISIBLE FACTS INTO THE WITNESS BOX AS THE ATTESTORS OF HIS INVISIBLE POWER. Of course, the miracle was such a witness in a special way, in as much as it and forgiveness were equally Divine prerogatives and acts. We have again the principle of the relative importance of the miracle and the thing attested, and regards the miracle as subordinate to the higher and spiritual work of bringing pardon.

But we may widen out this into the thought that the subsidiary effects of Christian faith in individuals, and of the less complete Christian faith which is diffused over society, to stand as very strong evidence of the reality of Christ's professions and claims to exercise this invisible power or pardon.

Or to put it into a concrete form, and to take an illustration which may need large deductions, go into a biblical oriented rescue mission, Pacific Gardens Mission. Don't you see there that which looks like the wine of the kingdom? Are there not visible results of that, as of every earnest effort to carry the message of forgiveness to men, which create an immense presumption in favor of its reality and Divine origin? Men reclaimed, passions tamed, homes that were pandemoniums made bethels, houses of God. Wherever Christ's forgiveness and His forgiving power really come into a soul, life is beautiful, is purified, is ennobled, and secondary and material benefits follow in the train.

I claim all the difference between Christendom and heathendom as attestation of the reality of Christ's Divine and atoning work on the cross. I believe it to be a valid argument as against much of the doubt of this day, "If you seek His monument, look around." His own answer to the ques-

tion, "Art Thou he that should come?" is valid still. "Go and tell John the things that ye see and hear." The dead are raised, the deaf ears are opened, faculties that lie dormant are quickened, and in a thousand ways the swift spirit of life flows from Him and vitalizes the dead masses of humanity. Let any system of belief or of no belief do the like if it can. This rod has budded at any rate. Let the magicians do the same with their enchantments.

Now we are told by the Lord, "Ye are My witnesses." **The world takes its notions of Christianity, and its belief in the power of Christianity, a great deal more from you than it does from preachers and apologists.** YOU ARE THE BIBLES THAT MOST MEN READ. See to it that your lives represent worthily the redeeming and the ennobling power of your Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And for the rest of us, do not waste your time trying to purify the stream 20 miles down from the fountainhead, but go to the source. Do not believe, believer, that your palsy, or your fever, your paralysis of will towards good, or the unwholesome ardor with which you are impelled to wrong, and the consequent misery and restlessness, can ever be elevated until you go to Christ, the forgiving Christ, and let Him lay His hand upon you, and from His own sweet and infallible lips hear the word that shall come as a charm through all your soul, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."

Then "shall the eyes of the blind be opened. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart." These passages speak of the Millennium. Then limitations, sorrows, miseries, will

pass away, and forgiveness will bear fruit in joy and power, in holiness, health and peace. "Heal me Jesus," your soul or your body? **Which is most important to you, the alleviation of pain for time only, or the salvation of your soul for all eternity?** Christ came to seek and save that which was lost, not that which was sick. He is a soul winner and the Holy Spirit convicts of unbelief in Christ.

Christ said, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because the Lord hath anointed me to PREACH GOOD TIDINGS UNTO THE MEEK. He hath sent Me to bind up the BROKEN-HEARTED, TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all that mourn."

HE CAME TO SAVE, NOT TO HEAL! "Heal me Jesus," of what? Soul or body? "What will it profit you if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul?"

"Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee. It is better for thee to enter into eternal life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire."

Forgiveness of sin is your
healing.

Buddy Dano, Pastor

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