

## RHODA

"A damsel... named Rhoda..." Acts 12:13.

**R**hoda means "a rose," and "this rose" in my life has kept its bloom for many years now, for some 2000 years, and is still sweet and fragrant and will always be. What a lottery of undying fame it. Men will give their lives to earn it, and this servant-girl got it by one little act, and never knew that she had it. And I suppose she does not know today that, everywhere throughout the whole world where the Gospel is preached, "This that she hath done is spoken of as a memorial to her."

Is the love of fame worthy of being called "the last infirmity of noble minds?" Or is it the delusion of ignoble ones? **Why need we care whether anybody ever hears of us after we are dead and buried, so long as the Lord knows about us?** The damsel named Rhoda was little the better for the immortality which she had unconsciously won.

There is a resemblance between the details of this incident and those of another case, when Peter was recognized in dim light by his voice, and Luke, who is the author of Acts, seems to have had the resemblance between the two scenes, that in the high priests' palace and that outside Mary's door, in his mind, because he uses in this narrative a word which occurs, in the whole of the New Testament only here and in his account of what took place on that earlier occasion.

In both instances a maid-servant recognizes Peter by his voice, and in both "she constantly affirms" that it was so. I don't know if you can build upon this resemblance, but at all events I think that the use of the same unusual word in the two cases, and nowhere else, seems to suggest that Luke felt how strangely events sometimes double themselves, and how the apostle who is here all but a martyr is re-enacting, with differences, something like the former scene, when he was altogether a traitor.

But, regardless, there are some lessons which we may gather from this vivid picture of Rhoda and her behaviour on the one side of the door, while Peter stood hammering, in the morning twilight, on the other side of the door. We can notice in the relations of Rhoda to the assembled believers a striking illustration of the new bond of union supplied by the Gospel.

Rhoda was a slave. The word rendered in one version "damsel," means a female slave. Her name, which is a gentile name, and her servile condition, make it probably that she was not a Jewess. If we would want to indulge in a guess, it is not at all unlikely that her mistress, Mary, John Mark's mother, Barnabas' sister, a well to do woman of Jerusalem, who had a house large enough to take in the members of the church in great numbers, and to keep up a considerable establishment, had brought this slave girl from the island of Cyprus. At all events, she was a slave.

In the time of our Lord, and long after, these relations of slavery brought an element of suspicion, fear, and jealous espionage into almost every Roman household, because every master knew that he passed his days and night among men and women who wanted nothing better than to wreak their vengeance upon him. "A man's foes were eminently those of his own household."

How here this child slave, a gentile, has been touched by the same mighty love as her mistress. Mary and Rhoda were kneeling together in the prayer meeting when Peter began to hammer at the door.

"And when Peter was come to himself, he said now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were"

gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in and told how Peter stood before the gate."

Now neither woman thought of the unnatural, unwholesome relation which had formerly bound them. In God's good time, and by the slow process of leavening society with Christian ideas, that diabolical institution perished in Christian lands. Violent reformation of immoralities is always a mistake. "Raw haste is half-sister to delay."

Settlers in forest lands have found that it is endless work to grub up the trees, or even to fell them. "Root and branch" reform seldom answers. The true way is to girdle the tree by taking off a ring of bark round the trunk, and letting nature do the rest. Dead trees are easily dealt with, living ones blunt many axes and tire many arms, and are alive after all.

Thus the Gospel waged no direct war with slavery, but laid down principles which, once they were wrought into Christian consciousness, made its continuance impossible. But, pending that consummation, the immediate action of Christianity was to ameliorate the condition of the slave. **The whole aspect of the ugly thing was changed as soon as master and slave together became slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Gospel has the same sort of work to do today, and there are institutions in full flourishing existence in this and every other civilized community that are entirely antagonistic to the spirit and principles of Christianity as Roman slavery was. I, for my part, believe that **the one uniting bond and healing medicine for society is found only in Jesus Christ, and that in Him, and that the principles deducible from His revelation by Word and work, applied to all social evils, are their cure, and their only cure.**

That slight, girlish figure standing at the door of Mary, her slave and her sister in

Christ, may be taken as pointing symbolically the way by which the social and civic evils of this day are to be healed, and the war of classes to cease. "Neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, male nor female, we are all one in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Also this "*Woman in My Life*," Rhoda (Rose), teaches us the sacredness and the greatness of small common duties counting for the Lord. Rhoda came out from the prayer meeting to open the gate. It was her business, as we say, to answer the door, and so she left off praying to go and do it. So doing, she was the means of delivering the apostle from the danger which still dogged him. It was of little use to be praying on one side of the shut door when on the other he was standing in the street, and the day was beginning to dawn. Herod's men would be after him as soon as daylight disclosed his escape.

The one thing needful for him was to be taken in and sheltered. So the praying group and the girl who stops praying when she hears the knock, to which it was her business to attend, were working in the same direction. It is not necessary to insist that no heights or delights of devotion and secret communion are sufficient excuses for neglecting or delaying the doing of the smallest and most menial task, which is our task, opening a door. **If your business is to keep the door, you will not be leaving, but abiding in, the secret place of the Most High, if you get up from your knees in the middle of your prayer, and go down and open it.**

**The smallest, commonest, acts of daily life are truer worship than in rapt and solitary or united prayer, if the latter can only be secured by the neglect of the former.** Better to be in the lower parts of the house attending to the humble duties of the slave than to be in the upper chamber, uniting with the saints in supplication and leaving tasks unperformed. **You are in full time Christian service at the point of salvation in Christ, and whatever you do you do it as unto the Lord with all your might, even opening a door.**

We must remember how we may find here an illustration of still another great truth in Rhoda, **that the smallest things done in the course of the quiet discharge of recognized duty, and being, therefore, truly worship of God, have in them a certain quality of immortality, and may be eternally commemorated.** It was not only the lofty and unique expression of devotion, which another woman gave when she broke the alabaster box to anoint the feet of our Saviour, which were to be pierced with nails tomorrow, that has been held worthy of undying remembrance.

The name and act of a poor slave girl have been commemorated by that Spirit who preserves nothing in vain, in order that we should learn the things which we vulgarly call great, and those which we insolently call small, are regarded by God the Holy Spirit, not according to their apparent magnitude, **but according to their motive and reference to Him.** Christ said, "I will never forget any of their works." And this little deed of Rhoda's, like the rose petals that careful housekeepers in the country keep upon the sideboard in china bowls to diffuse a fragrance through the room, is given us to keep in memory for ever, **a witness of the sanctity of common life when filled with the Spirit in acts of obedience to Him.**

This same figure, of the "damsel named Rhoda," may give us a warning as to the possibility of forgetting very plain duties under the pressure of very legitimate excitement. "SHE OPENED NOT THE DOOR FOR GLADNESS, but ran and told them." And, as if, while she was running in which her message, Herod's quaternions of soldiers had come down the street, there would have been no small stir, in the church as to "what had become of Peter."

He would have gone back to his prison sure enough. Her "first duty" was to open the door. Her second one was to go and tell the brethren we have got him safe inside. But in the rush of joyous emotions, she naively forgot what her first business was, "lost her

head," as we say, and so went off to tell that he was outside, instead of letting him in.

Joy and sorrow are equally apt to make us forget plain and pressing duties, and we may learn from this little incident the old-fashioned, but always necessary advice, to keep feelings well under control, to use it as impulse, and not as a guide, and never to let emotion, which should be down in the engine room, come on deck and take the wheel, the helm. **It is dangerous to obey feelings, unless the decrees are countersigned by calm common sense illuminated by the Scriptures.**

Sorrow is apt to obscure duty by its darkness, and joy to do so by its dazzle. It is hard to see the road at midnight, or at midday, when the sun is in our eyes. Both need to be controlled. **Duty remains the same, whether my heart is beating like a sledge hammer or whether my bosom's Lord sits lightly on its throne.**

Whether I am sad or glad, the door that God has given me to watch has to be opened, and shut by me, and whether I am a door keeper in the house of the Lord, like Rhoda in Mary's, or have an office that people think larger and more important, **the imperativeness of my duties is equally independent of my momentary emotions and circumstances. Remember then, that duty remains while feeling fluctuates, and that, sorrowful or joyful, we have still the same Lord to serve and the same crown to win.** "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, faith, self-control."

And finally in Rhoda, this "*Woman in My Life,*" we have an instance of a very modest, but positive and fully warranted trust in one's own experience in spite of opposition. They had been praying here for Peter's deliverance, and now that he is delivered, they will not believe it. There is sometimes a dash of unbelief in immediate answers to our prayers mingling with the prayer. And although the petitions in this case were intense and fervent, as the original language tells us, and had been kept up all night long, and although their earnestness and worthiness are guaran-

ted by the fact that they were answered, yet when the veritable Peter, in flesh and blood, stood before the door, the suppliants first said to the poor girl, Rhoda, "Thou art mad." And then, "It is an angel," not Peter. "It cannot be he."

Nobody seems to have thought of going to the door to see whether it was Peter or not, but they went on arguing with Rhoda as to whether she was right or wrong. **The unbelief that alloys even golden faith is taught us in this incident.** Rhoda, "constantly affirmed that it was so." **The lesson is trust your own experience, whatever people may say against it.** If you have found that Jesus Christ can help you, and has loved you, and that your sins have been forgiven, because you have trusted in Him, do not let anybody laugh or talk you out of that conviction.

If you cannot argue, do like Rhoda did, "Constantly affirm that it is so." That is the right answer, especially if you can say to the agnostic party, have you been down to the door, then, to see? And if you have to say, "No," then the right answer is, "You go and look as I did, and you will come back with the same belief which I have."

When something happens to you from the Lord, it is yours and it is personal, and they cannot tell you it didn't happen because you have had the experience that it has.

Well, at last they open the door and there Peter stands. Peter's hammer, hammer, hammer at the gate is wonderfully given in the story. It goes on as a kind of running accompaniment through the talk between Rhoda and the friends. It might have put a stop to the conversation, one might have thought. But there is still "Another who stands at the door knocking, still more persistently, still more patiently. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man open the door, I will come in and sup with him." And this is addressed to believers with a challenge to get back into fellowship with Christ so that He can sup with you.

**Rhoda, the flower of the Word, teaches us the importance of being faithful in small things, and doing your job as unto the Lord no matter if it is a door or a cup of cold water in the Lord's Name. It is eternally rewarded and recorded as gold, silver, and precious stones.**

Rhoda says be the best, whatever it is you are.

Thank you, Rhoda.... Rose.