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## Religious.

### LOOSING THE SHOE-LATCHET.

From a Sermon delivered March 31st, 1872, by Rev. CHARLES H. SPURGEON, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London.]

LUKE III. 16.—“One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose.”

It was not John's business to attract followers to himself, but to point them to Jesus, and he very faithfully discharged his commission. His opinion of his Master, of whom he was the herald, was a very high one; he revered him as the anointed of the Lord, the King of Israel, and, consequently, he was not tempted into elevating himself into a rival. He rejoiced to declare “He must increase, but I must decrease.” In the course of his self-depreciation, he uses the expression of our text, which is recorded by each one of the Evangelists, with some little variation. This putting on, and taking off and putting away of sandals, was an office usually left to menial servants, it was not a work of any repute or honor, yet the Baptist felt that it would be a great honor to be even a menial servant of the Lord Jesus. Now this honest estimate of himself as less than nothing in comparison with his Master is greatly to be imitated by us. John is to be commended and admired for this, but better still, he is to be carefully copied.

I gather from this, first, that *no form of holy service is to be lightly set by; secondly, that our unworthiness is apparent in the presence of any sort of holy work; but that, thirdly, this unworthiness of ours, when most felt, should rather stimulate us to action than discourage us, for so it doubtless operated in the case of John the Baptist.*

1. First, then, note that **NO FORM OF HOLY SERVICE IS TO BE LIGHTLY SET BY.** To unloose the latches of Christ's shoes might seem very trivial; it might even seem as if it involved the loss of self-respect for a man of position and influence to stoop to offices which a servant might quite as well perform. Why should I bring myself down to that? I will learn of Christ; I will distribute bread among the multitude for Christ; I will have my boat by the sea-shore ready for Christ to preach in, or I will go and fetch the ass upon which he shall ride in triumph into Jerusalem; but what need can there be for the disciple to become a mere menial? Such a question as that is here forever silenced, and the spirit which dictates it is practically rebuked. Nothing is dishonorable by which Jesus may be honored. Nothing lowers a man, if thereby he honors his Lord. It is not possible for any godly work to be beneath our dignity; rather ought we to know that the lowest grade of service bestows dignity upon the man who heartily performs it. Even the least and most obscure form of serving Christ is more high and lofty than we are worthy to undertake.

Now, note that little works for Christ, little shoe bearings and latchet-loosings, often have more of the child's spirit in them than greater works. Outside, in the streets, a man's companion will do him a kindness, and the action performed is friendly; but for filial acts you must look inside the house. There the child does not lend money to its father, or negotiate business, yet in his little acts there is more sonship. Who is it that comes to meet father when the day is over? and what is the action which often indicates childhood's love? See, the little child comes tottering forward with father's slippers, and runs off with his boots as he puts them off. The service is little, but it is loving and filial, and has more of filial affection in it than the servant's bringing in the meal, or preparing the bed, or any other more essential service. It gives the little one great pleasure, and expresses his love. No one who is not my child, or who does not

love me in something like the same way, would ever dream of making such a service his speciality. The littleness of the act fits it to the child's capacity, and there is also something in it which makes it a suitable expression of a child's affection. So also in little acts for Jesus. Oftentimes men of the world will give their money to the cause of Christ, putting down large sums for charity or for missions, but they will not weep in secret over other men's sins, or speak a word of comfort to an afflicted saint. To visit a poor sick woman, teach a little child, reclaim a street Arab, breathe a prayer for enemies, or whisper a promise in the ear of a desponding saint, may show more of sonship than building a row of almshouses or endowing a church.

In little acts for Christ, it is always to be remembered that the *little things are as necessary to be done as the greater acts.* If Christ's feet be not washed, if his sandals be not unloosed, he may suffer, and his feet may be lamed, so that a journey may be shortened, and many villages may miss the blessing of his presence. So with other minor things. There is as much need for the quiet intercessions of saints as for the public delivery of God's truth before the assembled thousands. It is as needful that babes be taught their little hymns as that monarchs be rebuked for sin. We remember the old story of the losing of the battle through the missing of a single nail in a horse-shoe, and peradventure up to this moment the church may have lost her battle for Christ, because some minor work which ought to have been done for Jesus has been neglected. I should not wonder if it should turn out that many churches have been without prosperity because, while they looked to the public ministry and the visible ordinances, they have been negligent of smaller usefulnesses. Many a cart comes to grief through inattention to the linchpin. A very small matter turns an arrow aside from the target. To teach a child to sing “Gentle Jesus,” and to point its young heart to the Redeemer, may seem a trifle, but yet it may be a most essential part of the process of that gracious work of religious education by which that child shall afterwards become a believer, a minister, and a winner of souls. Omit that first lesson, and it may be you have turned aside a life. Brethren, never neglect the loosening of the shoe-latchet for Christ, since you do not know what may hang upon it. Human destiny often turns upon a hinge so small as to be invisible. Never say within yourself, “This is trivial”—nothing is trivial for the Lord. Never say, “But this surely might be omitted without much loss.” How knowest thou? If it be thy duty, he who allotted thee thy task knew what he did. Do not thou in any measure neglect any portion of his orders, for in all his commands there is consummate wisdom, and on thy part, it will be wisdom to obey them, even to the jots and titles.

Little things for Christ, again, are often the best tests of the truth of our religion. Obedience in little things has much to do with the character of a servant. You engage a servant in your own house, and you know very well, whether she be a good or bad servant, that the main duties of the day are pretty sure to be attended to; the meal will be cooked, the beds will be prepared, the house will be swept, the door will be answered; but the difference between a servant who makes the house happy and another who is its plague, lies in a number of small matters, which, peradventure, you could not put down on paper, but which make up a very great deal of domestic comfort or discomfort, and so determines the value of a servant. So I believe it is in Christian life; I do not suppose that the most of us here would ever omit the weightier matters of the law; but it is in the looking to the Lord upon minor details that the spirit of obedience is most displayed; it is seen in our keeping our eye up to the Lord, as the eyes of the hand-maiden's are to their mistresses for daily orders about this

step and that transaction. In small things lie the crucibles and the touchstones. Any hypocrite will come to the Sabbath worship, but it is not every hypocrite that will attend prayer-meetings, or read the Bible in secret, or speak privately of the things of God to the saints. You shall find the same true in other things. A man who is no Christian will very likely not tell you a downright lie by saying that black is white, but he will not hesitate to declare that whitybrown is white—he will go that length. Now, the Christian will not go halfway to falsehood, nay, he scorns to go an inch on that road. He will no more cheat you out of twopenny farthing, than he would out of two thousand pounds. He will not rob you of an inch any more than of an ell. Even a Pharisee will ask Christ to his house to sit at meat with him, he is willing to entertain a great religious leader at his table; but it is not every one who will stoop down and unloose his shoes, for that very Pharisee who made the feast neither brought him water to wash his feet, nor gave him the kiss of welcome; he proved the insincerity of his hospitality by forgetting the little things. I will be bound to say Martha and Mary never forgot to unloose his shoe-latches, and that Lazarus never failed to see that his feet were washed. Look then, I pray you, as Christians, to the service of Christ in the obscure things, in the things that are not recognized by men, in the matters which have no honor attached to them, for by this shall your love be tried.

Mark, also, with regard to little works, that very often *there is about them a degree of personal fellowship with Christ which is not seen in greater work.* For instance, in the one before us, to unloose the latches of his shoes brings me into contact with himself, though it be only his feet I touch; and I think if I might have the preference between going forth to cast out devils and to preach the gospel and to heal the sick, or to stay with him and always loose the latches of his shoes, I should prefer this last; because the first act Judas did—he went with the twelve, and saw Satan like lightning fall from heaven, but he perished because he failed in the acts that came into contact with Christ—in keeping Christ's purse he was a thief, and in giving Christ the kiss he was a traitor. He who does not fail in things relating personally to Christ is the sound man, he has the evidence of righteousness of heart. There was never a grander action done beneath the stars than when the woman broke her alabaster box of precious ointment and poured it upon him; though the poor did not get anything out of it, though no sick man was the better for it, the act was done distinctly unto him, and therefore there was a peculiar sweetness in it. Oftentimes similar actions, because they do not encourage other people, for they do not know of them, because they may not be of any very great value to our fellow-men, are lightly esteemed, yet seeing they are done for Christ, they have about them a peculiar charm as terminating upon his blessed person. True, it is but the loosening of shoe-latches, but then, they are his shoes, and that ennobles the deed.

Dear fellow-Christians, you know what I mean, though I cannot put it into very good language this morning—I mean just this, that if there is some little thing I can do for Christ, though my minister will not know about it, though the deacons and elders will not know, and nobody will know, and if I leave it undone nobody will suffer any calamity because of it; but, if I do it, it will please my Lord, and I shall enjoy the sense of having done it to him, therefore will I attend to it, for it is no slight work if it be for him.

Mark, also, once more, concerning those gracious actions which are but little esteemed by the most of mankind, that we know *God accepts our worship in little things.* He allowed his people to bring their bullocks, others of them to bring their rams, and offer them to him; and these were persons of suffi-

cient wealth to be able to afford a tribute from their herds and flocks, but he also permitted the poor to offer a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, and I have never found in God's Word that he cared less for the turtle-dove offering than he did for the sacrifice of the bullock. I do know, too, that our ever-blessed Lord himself, when he was here, loved the praise of little children. They brought neither gold nor silver, like the wise men from the East, but they cried “Hosanna,” and the Lord was not angry with their Hosannas, but accepted their boyish praise. And we remember that a widow woman cast into the treasury two mites, which only made a farthing, but, because it was all her living, he did not reject the gift, but rather recorded it to her honor. We are now quite familiar with the incident, but for all that it is very wonderful. Two mites that make a farthing given to the infinite God! A farthing accepted by the King of kings! A farthing acknowledged by him who made the heavens and the earth, who saith, “If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the cattle on a thousand hills are mine.” Two mites received with pleasure by the Lord of all! It was scarcely so much as a drop thrown into the sea, and yet he thought much of it. Measure not, therefore, little actions by human scales and measures, but estimate them as God does, for the Lord hath respect unto the hearts of his people; he regardeth not so much their deeds in themselves, as the motives by which they are actuated. Therefore, value the loosening of the Saviour's shoe-latches, and despise not the day of small things.

II. Now, brethren and sisters, I wish to conduct you, in the second place, to the consideration of **OUR OWN UNWORTHINESS**, which is sure to be felt by us whenever we come practically into contact with any real Christian service. I believe that a man who does nothing at all thinks himself a fine fellow, as a general rule. You shall usually find that the sharpest critics are those who never write; and the best judges of battles those who keep at a prudent distance from the guns. Christians of the kid-gloved order, who never make an attempt to save souls, are marvellous quick to tell us when we are too rough or too light in our speech; and they readily detect us, if our modes of action are irregular or too enthusiastic. They have a very keen scent for anything like fanaticism or disorder. For my part, I feel pretty safe when I have the censures of these gentlemen; we are not far wrong when they condemn us. Let a man begin earnestly to work for the Lord Jesus, and he will soon find out that he is unworthy of the meanest place in the employ of one so glorious. Let us turn over that fact a minute. Dear brothers and sisters, when we recollect what we used to be, I am sure we must feel unworthy to do the very least thing for Christ.

But, then, another reflection comes at the back of it—we recollect what we are, as well as what we were—I say, what we are, for though washed in Jesus' blood, and endowed with a new heart and a right spirit, yet we start aside like a deceitful bow, for corruption dwells in us. It is sometimes hard to maintain even a little faith, we are so double-minded, so unstable, so hot, so cold, so earnest, and then so negligent; we are so everything except what we ought to be, that we may well wonder that Christ allows us to do the least thing for him. If he were to shut us in prison and keep us there, so long as he did not actually execute us, he would be dealing with us according to mercy, and not giving us our full deserts; and yet he calls us out of prison, and puts us in his service, and therefore we feel that we are unworthy to perform the least action in his house.

Besides, beloved, even small services, we feel, require a better state of heart than we often have. Have you not felt, “I have to go and teach my class, this afternoon, but I am not fit,

I have been worried all the week with cares, and my mind is not up to the mark now; I hope I love my Lord, but I hardly know whether I do or not. I ought to be earnest about these boys and girls; but it is very likely I shall not be earnest, I shall sit down and go through my teaching as a parrot would go through it, without life, without love.” Yes, then you painfully feel that you are not worthy to unloose the latchet of your Lord's shoes.

The same feeling arises in another way. Have we not to confess, brethren and sisters, in looking upon what we have done for Christ, that *we have far too much eye to self in our conduct.* We pick and choose our work, and the picking and choosing is guided by the instinct of self-respect. If we are asked to do that which is pleasant to ourselves, we do it. If we are requested to attend a meeting where we shall be received with acclamation, if we are asked to perform a service which will lift us up in the social scale, or that will commend us to our fellow-Christians, we jump at it like a fish at a fly; but suppose the work would bring us shame, suppose it would discover to the public rather our inefficiency than our ability, we excuse ourselves. Why, if I cannot honor the Lord with ten talents, shall I refuse him with one? If I cannot fly like a strong-winged angel through the midst of heaven, and sound the shrill-mouthed trumpet so as to wake the dead, shall I refuse to be a little bee, and gather honey at God's bidding? Because I cannot be a leviathan, shall I refuse to be an ant? What folly and what rebellion, if we are so perverse.

My brethren, we ought to feel that we are not worthy to do the lowest thing we can do for Christ, because, *when we have gone to the lowest, Jesus always goes lower down than we have gone.* Is it a little thing to bear his shoes? What, then, was his condescension when he washed his disciples' feet. To put up with a cross-tempered brother, to be gentle with him, and feel, “I will give way to him in everything, because I am a Christian,” that is going very low; but then, our Lord has borne far more from us; he was patient with his people's infirmities, and forgave even to seventy times seven. And, suppose we are willing to take the lowest place in the church, yet Jesus took a lower place than we can, for he took the place of the curse—he was made sin for us, even he that knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. I have sometimes felt willing to go to the gates of hell to save a soul; but the Redeemer went further, for he suffered the wrath of God for souls. If there should be any Christian here who is so humble that he has no lofty thoughts about himself, but prefers to be least amongst his brethren, and so proves his graciousness, yet, my dear brother, you are not so lowly as Christ made himself, for he “made himself of no reputation,” and you have some reputation left; and he took upon himself the form of a servant, and he became obedient to death—you have not come to that yet; even the death of the cross—the felon's death upon the gibbet—you will never be brought to that. Oh, the stoop of the Redeemer's amazing love! Let us, henceforth, contend how long we can go side by side with him, but remember, when we have gone to the lowest he descends lower still, so that we can truly feel that the very lowest place is too high for us, because he has gone lower still.

Beloved friends, to put these things in a practical shape, it may seem to be a very small duty for any of you to do, to speak to one person alone about his soul. If you were asked to preach to a hundred, you would try it. Task you solemnly, in God's name, not to let the sun go down to-day till you have spoken to one man or woman alone about his or her soul. Will you not do that? Is it too little for you? Then I must be plain with you, and say you are not worthy to do it.