

The Feet of Jesus-the Place for Personal Ministration

by Philip Bennett Power

The sermon emphasizes the importance of serving Jesus in the smallest and humblest of ways, and the value of tears in bringing us closer to Him.

Scripture: Psalm 56:8, Matthew 25:40, Mark 5:27, Luke 7:37, John 13:14

Topics: "Christ's Humanity", "Serving Others"

Description

Philip Bennett Power preaches on the profound act of love and service displayed by a sinful woman towards Jesus, emphasizing the deep reasons behind God's unexpected revelation of His Son in humility before glory. The sermon delves into the significance of Christ's human nature in enabling our communion with Him, the importance of offering our feelings and infirmities to Jesus, and the encouragement to aim for the highest form of service driven by love. It highlights the perfection and energy found in the woman's ministry to Jesus' feet, urging believers to seek personal happiness and refreshment in serving Christ and His people.

Transcript

"And a woman in the town who was a sinner, found out that Jesus was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house. She brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil and stood behind Him at His feet, weeping, and began to wash His feet with her tears. She wiped His feet with the hair of her head, kissing them and anointing them with the fragrant oil." Luke 7:37-38

If man had been informed by God that He was about to reveal His only Son to the world, and had been asked what form this revelation should take, there is little doubt what his answer would have been. He would have said, "As the Son of God, it is fit that He should appear in great glory; a throne must be His seat, legions of angels His attendants; the music of heaven must float around Him, the radiance of heaven beam from Him; without shading--the eye should not be able to look upon Him, and without trembling--the knee should not stand before Him."

But the ways of God are not as our ways, neither are His thoughts like ours. And so, before He gives us a revelation of His Son in glory, with a countenance shining as the sun in his strength, with a head glorious with many crowns, and feet like unto fine brass, as though they burnished in a furnace--He presents Him to us with a visage marred more than any man's; with head unpillowed and with feet unwashed.

For this, so unexpected an appearance--so low an abasement of the Son of God, there must have been deep reasons in His Father's mind. Some of these we ourselves can see; and such divide themselves into two classes--those which belonged to His humiliation as necessary for the atonement; and those which have to do with us in our feeling and communion with God, and practical spiritual life--internally in our thoughts, externally in our acts.

How would it have been with us, if we had not seen Christ, as it were, from head to foot, as He is revealed to us in the history of His life on earth--in the very fullness of His human nature? We never could have gone out to Him in our human nature. We might have taken off our shoes and worshiped where His feet had trodden, for it was holy ground; but we could never have walked with Him. We would have considered what was essentially human in us--too small to come into contact with what was essentially and wholly Divine, with what was so awesome. The confidings of our human nature would have been all pent in. We would have been frightened to go to Him with many a tale, which we can now tell Him without fear. But why is it thus now, when His last appearance, as given in the Revelation, is so grand? Because many thorns preceded the many crowns; and weariness and neglect were the portion of those feet, which having passed heaven's threshold in triumph, now burn like fine brass!

Nor could we have believed in Christ's sympathy as we do now; our dull hearts would not have been so assured of His feeling for us, unless we knew that He also had felt trials like our own.

Nor could we have offered Him our feelings and infirmities, as we now can. What a wonderful thought this is! God in Christ desires human sympathies; He has so arranged that these sympathies are possible, that they can reach Him--that we may offer Him our feelings; and He has given us the privilege of solidifying our feelings. This poor woman's offering to the feet of Jesus--her tears and ointment, and that lowly ministry of her hair, became, so to speak, solidified; the Jesus who turned water into wine has made them shine with a resplendent light for His Church through many ages.

God loves to embody His thoughts; they are so embodied in countless forms of beauty around us. He embodied them pre-eminently in Christ, and He wills that we should embody our sympathies with Jesus. Therefore let us do as this woman did--let us not merely talk, and look--but do. He who sympathizes practically with the lowly ones of Christ, or with the small and worrying troubles of even the smallest of His people, does so with His feet--they wash, they wipe, they anoint, they kiss.

The activities of practical Christian life are constructed and based upon, and energized by, the personality of Jesus. Everywhere we are met by "the man Christ Jesus." Mere dreams and sentiments take flight before a substantial Christ. If only we will see it--He is still in our midst. Take Him away, and our spiritual life will be divested of a central, moving figure--one whose life on earth, as well as whose glory in heaven--are ever to be before us.

And so, we might go on with many other evils which would happen, if we had not as a Christ--One who with human feet walked the same earth as we do, and whose feet were ministered to with such acceptance as we find here.

Thus keeping before us the person of Jesus, we also may in our measure realize the apostle's words, "That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life."

Let us do all things so personally to Christ--let us hear His voice saying so plainly, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren--you have done it unto me," that we may indeed be able to take up those words and say, "What we have seen, looked upon, handled of the Word of life."

A large subject is embraced here--but we shall confine ourselves to the Feet of Christ as the place of personal ministrations.

Let us mark here the highest, or heaped-up nature of this woman's service. There was washing, wiping, kissing, anointing. It is like a cluster of diamonds in a single ring, like many fruits on one bough.

And the first thought which strikes us concerning it is a sorrowful one; it is the difference between this woman's highest service, and the poor, and often grudging service, which we offer. We look upon service too often as under law--that we are commanded to do this and that; it becomes the fulfillment of law, and nothing more. And so it comes to pass, that much of our service becomes grudging or of necessity, and inquires not "how much can be given," but "what will be enough," "what will barely do." The hardness which belongs to law enters into this service; and like all our attempts at law-keeping, it falls short.

But this woman's service was under no law. She was not even under the unwritten law of hospitality; for Jesus was not in her house. This service was the representative not of law--but love; and in love it found a motive power, which law never could have supplied.

Let us aim at the highest service--to do much to Christ; for in doing it for Him, we do it to Him. And let us remember that this service will not be noted merely in the mass, God will separate it into its component parts. Each specific good thing will be noted. God will unwind the golden thread into its various strands; He will pass the ray beneath a prism, which will divide it into many hues.

We take things in the lump; our earthliness, our lack of memory, our imperfect power of perception, all conduce to this; but God is too exact not to note the parts which make up the whole.

If we pay a visit to the sick for His sake, He notes all the component parts of that visit--the cheery word we uttered, the tone in which it was spoken, the gentle touch of the sick one's hand, the patient silence while listening to complaints, the loving craft by which we sought to take the afflicted one's mind, away from himself. In our mind--it may be, in the sick one's mind--we paid a visit, and that was all. But God knows what there was in that visit, and He counts it all up, and records it even as He does the washing, wiping, kissing, and anointing here.

The feet of Jesus were the recipients of love's highest service; and what encouragement is there here to those who are diffident about aiming high. The feet, at least, are open to them; they may pour out all their fullness upon what is very lowly, yet belonging to Christ. The lowliest object may be the recipient of highest service. Jesus Himself took care to point this out when He said, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren--you have done it unto me!"

There is also a certain perfection in this service which the reader is invited to observe. There was washing and wiping. This was no half--no unfinished service--but one altogether perfect in its kind. The wiping was the needed consequence of the washing; and it is forthcoming, and that with no diminution of love's intensity. There were tears with which to wash--and there was hair with which to wipe.

One fact which strikes us here is, the continued strength or energy of this service; the ministry of the tears of her eyes--is immediately followed by that of the hair of her head. Surely this woman's hair and tears

have a voice for us. When we put our service by the side of hers--we are reminded how often we diminish, how often we leave unfinished, how often we think we have done enough, when there plainly remains yet more to be done.

Some of the most beautiful services in God's eyes are probably so from their perfection, and not their extent. God loves what is perfect in its kind. Its kind may be very lowly; He Himself has made a great many very lowly things--little flowers and insects which make no pretension to being otherwise than lowly; but when He had seen everything that He had made, He pronounced it to be "very good." Lowliness of position, and perfection of kind may go together.

It is a sign of a perfect workman not to leave anything unfinished; and LOVE should be of all workers, the most perfect.

But there was another element of perfection in this ministry to the feet of Jesus. She gave not only herself, but her substance. After washing, wiping, and kissing, all three as it were givings of her very self--she anointed Him with the ointment from the alabaster box.

There were three personal services--services of herself--before there was the giving of substance. The ointment was very precious--but it did not weigh down what had gone before.

It might be said, service can be recognized in the washing and wiping; but what service was there in the kissing? The answer is that, a kiss is a service of love--a performance of the lip on behalf of the heart; the heart feeling that it must do something to show its love, and the lip lending it its aid. This woman probably uttered not a word during all this process of love--let it not be considered a contradiction in terms that, her KISS was the voice of voiceless love.

From the position in which the mention of her kissing of Jesus' feet is found--midway between the two ministries of the washing and wiping, and the anointing--a thought arises with reference to our own personal feeling in service. It must needs have been, that this worshiping woman had herself some of the enjoyment of love's sweetness and refreshment, when she kissed those feet of Jesus. It is no irreverence--but strictly within the probability of things, to believe that an ineffable sense of happiness passed through her, as she thus vented her adoring love upon the honored feet of Jesus!

I accept with comfort the suggestion which hereon rises in my mind. I say, "There is to be happiness for the server in his service--as well as honor for the served one, in being served."

And, reader, you must seek to enjoy this privilege. Do not argue against yourself and say, "How can there be any happiness where there are tears?" Ah! some of the most delicately-shaded happiness is found amid tears. There are flowers which are obliged to hang down their heads by reason of the heavy showers--but their perfume has not gone.

Seek for personal happiness when rendering to Jesus personal service; seek for refreshment to your own soul, when refreshing His people--that is, Himself.

Let us bracket kissing and anointing together, as we did washing and wiping; the one was a true symbol, the other a costly and substantial reality of love. Kisses may be poor things like Orpah's, or deceitful like Judas'. But when the kiss and the fatted calf go together--the kiss and the ointment--there is no mistake.

But let us return more immediately for a moment from this ministering woman--to the feet which were ministered unto. All was lavished upon the least, as it were of Jesus--upon His feet.

How often we think that only the head--some great cause of Jesus, or some great enterprise for Him can be worthily served. But the feet of Jesus had here a great capacity for absorbing service, the washing, wiping, kissing, anointing--were all accepted and appreciated.

We know that the very head of Jesus may be anointed--that He graciously places it within our reach; that what may be called great enterprises for Him may be undertaken; but for the most part we have to do with the feet.

Let not the reader, then, sigh after great spheres of service, or seek great outvents for love to his Savior. He who is untrue in the least, would be also untrue in the greatest; he who neglects the feet would neglect the head. Amid the dust-soiled, the way-worn, and the neglected will be found recipients capable of absorbing all the service that we can give. Like the feet of Jesus, they lie within our reach; it is only fit that the lowest and the least of God's--should be able to absorb the greatest and the best of ours. It will be a great encouragement to us in our ministrings among humble people, or in doing humble offices, to remember that they actually have a capacity for swallowing up our utmost efforts--they are big enough for the most that we can do.

From among many others which lie to hand, let us just take one point more for a moment's thought.

What shall we do with our tears? The world is full of tears, and many of them are wasted. Now there should be no waste of anything, and tears are not intended to be spilt upon the ground. The Psalmist knew that God valued tears when he prayed, "Put my tears into Your bottle."

Tears are to be brought into connection with Jesus. The tears which touched the feet, thrilled through the being of the Lord. We may hold back, thinking that we cannot reach the heart of Christ; but let us touch Him anywhere, His whole being is sensitive, He will soon say, "Somebody, something has touched Me!"

And now, lastly, let those who read these lines make up for the neglect of duty by others, by the exuberance and fullness of their own love.

Simon's duty, in common hospitality, was to have given Jesus water for His feet. He gave it not; but this woman supplied its place with tears.

May we have that love, which will supply the deficiencies even of those who profess to entertain the Lord. The closest personal services done to Him--those which will gain most place in that history which is for eternity--are those, not of duty--but of love; and many of them done, as it were, only to the "feet of Jesus."

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