

SABBATH-WORK

“And on the same day was the Sabbath.”

John 5:9

Still, it is worthy of notice that the Lord Jesus frequently made the Sabbath to be a high day of Grace and blessing. There was, I suppose, something about that day that led Him more especially to display His great power, or, perhaps, He felt bound to meet the superstition of the Pharisees, and He met it by a flood-tide of mercy upon that day to the sons of men. I have read to you the records of six notable miracles which were worked by our Lord on the Sabbath. [See EXPOSITION at end of sermon.] I need not read them, again, but I will just remind you that those miracles comprised the casting from a devil in the synagogue, the healing of a man whose hand was withered, the lifting up of a woman who had been bound by infirmity for 18 years, the instantaneous cure of the dread disease of dropsy, the recovering of a man who had been afflicted with palsy for 38 years so that he could not stir and the opening of the eyes of one who was born blind—six notable miracles to render the Sabbath most famous as a day of the display of Christ’s power!

The Sabbath was a day of rest and Christ did not break His rest by His miracles, for He was God, so it was rest to Him to do good. You remember how, when He spoke to the woman of Samaria at the well of Sychar, He told His disciples that it was His meat and drink to be dealing out mercy to her. He was refreshed by what, to others, might have been wearisome and, assuredly, whenever the Lord Jesus worked a deed of mercy, it was rest to His heart. And, moreover, it was giving rest to others. To those who had been afflicted so long, what rest His miracles brought! To that poor daughter of Abraham who had been bound 18 years—what rest it was, once more, to straighten herself and to stand upright, and to glorify God for the marvelous miracle that had been worked! And the man who had been bedridden for 38 years—what a time of merciful rest that Sabbath was for him! To take up his bed and walk was to be made truly to rest! Not for all that long period had he enjoyed such rest as he did on that memorable Sabbath when Christ healed him!

So, then, viewing the Lord Jesus Christ as Divine, I say that He committed no breach of the rest of God. He first enjoyed it, Himself, by working the miracle, and then He spread the influence of that rest upon those who were helped by Him. Viewing Him, also, in His condescending capacity as the God-Man, in the form of the Servant of men, He did not break the day of rest, for His healing was a form of holy ministry. He was preaching sermons while He was healing the sick—and the best sort of sermons, too—sermons that must strike and be remembered, for men could see them with their eyes as well as hear them with their ears! His cures are acted discourses. Whenever we try to interpret any of the miracles, I am sure you feel that we do not put the Truth of God into them, but that the Truth of God is already there! There is much precious teaching in every miracle that He worked.

The ruler of the synagogue might just as well have confessed that he broke the Sabbath when he read a chapter of the Scriptures as have said that Christ broke the Sabbath by healing anyone. They were really both doing the same thing, only the mere official was doing it in a much poorer and more perfunctory manner. Christ was grandly teaching while He was healing the sick, for what is the Sabbath? Is it not a day set apart for the Glory of God, for the reverencing of His most holy name? And, my Brothers and Sisters, what could bring God more Glory than for the Lord Jesus Christ to be working these miracles which caused men to glorify Him? She who had been bound for 18 years—the first thing she did when she stood upright was to glorify God! And others in the synagogue, of nobler spirit than Pharisees and lawyers, when they saw what God was doing by Him whom they thought to be a Prophet, glorified God. Although Jesus, in a measure, worked, He was all the while doing Sabbath-work—the very service for which the day was set apart, that God might be honored among the sons of men. Fools and slow of heart—no, foul of heart, were they, to bring the charge of breaking the Sabbath against our blessed Master for what He did.

I am going, very briefly, to refer to these cures of Christ in the fond hope that He will transfer from the seventh to the first day of the week the Glory which He put upon His ancient Sabbath. I need not say in the "hope" that He will do it, as though it were a new thing, for He has done it all through the Christian era! I suppose that there have been more souls born to God on the last day of the week than on all the other days of the week. Certainly, this day, on which Christ rose from the grave, has been the time of the resurrection of ten thousands times ten thousands—and when we have met together, on this first day of the week, to sing hymns and to pray in the name of Jesus—and to talk of His great love and of all that came of it, He has been especially present with us, and He has worked wondrous miracles of mercy many and many a time. May He do so among us now!

1. First, then, concerning Christ's Sabbath cures, I make this observation—THESE CURES MEET MANY CASES—and we may expect that Christ, who worked such cures in the past, will continue to meet similar cases of need today.

The first was a man under Satanic influence. Christ spoke the Word and the devil came out of him. There may be such persons here. I have known many children of God in that sad condition. Ah, poor creatures! They have been assailed with blasphemous thoughts which they have hated and loathed, and yet the thoughts would come. They could not stop them. And if it so happens to God's people, much more will it happen to those who, as yet, have never fled to Christ! I believe that there are some men who are transported in wickedness far beyond themselves and who both say and do things which would not have entered into their hearts, bad as they are, if it were not for Satan taking possession of them and bearing them beyond themselves. Just as I am sure that the Spirit of God often works in gracious men things which would not come, even of their renewed nature, carrying them from themselves by a holy ecstasy and a divine enthusiasm, so does Satan, on the other hand, work in ungodly men beyond themselves, bearing them into a kind of frenzy and fanaticism of iniquity. Well, if I am addressing any such—if it is a lucid interval with some poor wretch—if the drunk is sober tonight—if the man who plunges into vice is here—yes, even if the devilish spirit is still within him, I am glad that he is here, for my Master can rebuke that spirit and cast it from the man to never return! He will need more done to him than that, but that will be a grand beginning. Oh, that, in His infinite mercy, Jesus, the enthroned King, would manifest His Divinity by casting out the spirit of darkness from the stronghold which He has made for Himself in the hearts of men! That case, then, was met by Christ on the Sabbath.

The next case was that of a man conscious of a very grievous inability. He had an arm which hung helplessly by his side. He could not earn bread for his children. He could do nothing to help himself. His arm was withered—it was not merely dislocated, so that he could not lift it, but it had gradually dried up. The sinews had shrunk, the flesh had gone, the arm had become a mummified useless object. There are spiritual disabilities in all unregenerate men, but there are some disabilities of which they are conscious. "I cannot pray," says one, "oh, that I could!" "I cannot believe," says another, "would God that I could!" "I cannot do this, and I cannot do that." Dear Friend, whatever your inability may be, the Lord Jesus Christ is able to give you, even now, that power of which you lament the absence. He can say, "Stretch out your withered hand" and if you are but obedient to His gracious command, you shall stretch it out! You shall pray. You shall believe. You shall at once quit the sin that now holds you spellbound. Oh, blessed be His name, though the power to do these things is not in you, it is in Him! All that is needed to meet the sinner's case is in Christ, for all power is given unto Him in Heaven and in earth. Look up, then, you with the withered hands, for Christ is still present and able to heal, now, just as of old.

The third case was that of a woman who had been afflicted, I suppose, by spinal disease, till she was bent double. She could not lift herself up. It was something more than a mere stoop—it was evidently a very painful doubling of herself up so that her face looked rather to the earth than, as it should look, towards Heaven. Poor creature! Eighteen years she had suffered from this grievous bend, but the Lord Jesus lifted her up and made her straight in one single minute! There may be, here, some very desponding and even despairing soul, but the Lord can lift up that soul. Last Thursday morning I preached over in the City Temple and I had my wages for preaching as soon as the sermon was done, for when I came from the pulpit there met me a brother minister, and he said, "Sir, I cannot tell you now, but I will write tomorrow—my wife is set at liberty!" He wrote to

tell me how she had been in despair and what sorrow she had had, and what a grief it had been to him. But while I preached upon, "Cast not away your confidence, which has great recompense of reward," she was brought from bondage. Oh, how I praised and blessed God and thought that I would like to preach day and night if I might but be the channel of such blessing again and again! It was the Master who made that poor crooked woman straight and if there is another here who is like she is, He can work a similar miracle for that poor soul! I know that many of you belong to the Despondency family. Miss Much-Afraid, down there, you think there is nobody so bad as you, so lost as you are. But my Lord and Master can lay His hand upon you and you shall be straightened at once! Oh, what a blessed thought this is –Jesus worked this miracle on the Sabbath! Oh, that He would work others like it on this Sabbath!

The fourth case was that of

the man with the dropsy, an inward complaint which would soon have ended his life if

Christ had not cured him. Last Wednesday I saw a dear man of God who was afflicted with dropsy and I bade him farewell. He said that, in the night, when he slept a little, the water seemed to rise almost to his heart, and he knew that he must soon die. And when I called just now, I found that he was gone. I may be addressing someone who has an inward fatal complaint—I do not mean bodily, but spiritually—and you feel that it must soon be all over with you and that you must perish forever. But, dear Friend, you need not perish—if you come within range of my Master's hand, you shall live, for He is able to pluck men from the jaws of destruction! As it is said of this man, that He took him and healed him and bade him go his way, so can He do with you. God grant that He may!

The next case was that of a man paralyzed. I believe that the man, after being so afflicted for 38 years, had become paralyzed in his mind as well as in his body. He was a poor feeble creature who said to Christ, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool." So the Lord Jesus Christ said to him, "Will you be made whole?"—as if He would see whether the paralysis had penetrated even into his will—and when the man said that he had hardly any hope about it, but only described his sad case, the Master said at once, "Rise, take up your bed, and walk." And the man did so. Now, if you have been long a trembling seeker, not so much in earnest as you ought to have been, and have now come to be spiritually paralyzed so that you do not seem to have any energy left, yet still my Lord can give you energy and speak the healing words so that you shall rise and take up your bed and walk!

The last case was that of the man who was born blind. I know that he is represented here. Plenty of you were born blind. No, more—there is not one of you who was not born spiritually blind—and, "since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind." Perhaps it was not heard till that day, but on that blessed Sabbath, Christ opened that blind man's eyes! Oh, that He would take away the scales of prejudice that are blinding so many tonight! Oh, that He would remove the natural opposition to the Gospel which blinds so many eyes and hearts—and give men to see tonight! He can do it. Oh, that He may! I think that I have proved my assertion that these Sabbath cures meet many cases. They certainly meet the cases of many who are here. Christ is still, "able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them."

II. I shall only be able to say a little upon my second point which is that THESE CURES REPRESENT VARIOUS PROCESSES OF GRACE. The way in which Christ healed, then, shows how He heals now.

The first man He healed with a word. The devil in the man made a disturbance in the congregation. He cried, "Let me alone." Christ said, "Hold your peace and come from him." And I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ still deals with the devil in that way. He never gives him a word more than is necessary. Oh, that He would say, "Come from him," to some drunk who is here, and who has the drink devil in him, or to some swearer or some other great sinner who is here! That

man under Satanic influence was healed by a word and Christ can do the same thing with a word now!

The man with a withered hand was healed by a personal word. The Lord Jesus Christ said to him, "Rise up and stand forth in the midst." That he could do, for he had not withered feet and there he stood. It is a grand thing when the Gospel message picks a man out from his fellows and he feels that the preacher is speaking specially to him. Have you ever felt that? It is one of the ways in which Christ saves men. I am preaching to the whole congregation, but Christ is not—He is preaching to you, my Friend—if He means to bless you and you feel as if you were stood out to be shot at. After Christ had given the man a personal pointed word, He said to him, "Stretch forth your hand." It was done at once at the word of command and now He says to you, poor guilty Sinner, "Believe! Believe in Me and you shall be saved." Oh, that Christ might speak that word of command straight into your soul, for, as the Lord lives, if you believe in Him, you shall not perish, but you shall have everlasting life! In this man's case it was a personal word that worked the healing he needed.

In the next case, there was a touch as well as a word. The woman was in the crowd in the synagogue, bent double, and, perhaps, could not even see the Christ. But He said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity," and He laid His hands on her—and with that word and that touch she was loosed in a minute! She was called upon to do nothing except to believe that it was all done—and so she lifted herself up. The Lord Jesus Christ gave her the strength to rise and she did rise! There are many conversions like that. All of a sudden a man finds that all has been done for him—Christ has saved him, he is forgiven and so he rises and stands upright. Now, poor woman over yonder, do that! Believe that Christ has loved you and given Himself for you. Oh, may His Spirit enable you to do so! Now you are upright, are you not? You feel as if you could stand up and shout, "Hallelujah! The Lord has done it! He has broken my bonds and set His child at liberty." It was a word and a touch in that poor woman's case.

In the next case—that of the man afflicted with the dropsy—there was healing without a word. I do not think that there was even a word spoken to him. Christ saw the man swollen as He stood before him and it is written, "He took him, and healed him, and let him go." And I have known the Lord save some souls without any spoken word. His own secret power has done it all. The man has been sitting at his work, or walking about and, suddenly—he knew not how—he felt his heart become soft, his spirit inclined to his Savior, he looked to Him and was lightened and his face was not ashamed.

In the case of the paralytic, there was not only a word, there were two words. The first was an enquiring word, meant to arouse him. "Will you be made whole?" This was spoken to wake him up and make him think and hope. And then came the commanding word, "Take up your bed and walk." The Lord sometimes brings men into a state of spiritual health by two words instead of one. For a little while, He seems to ask them whether they really will be saved, whether they have any wish to be saved—and when earnest desires after salvation are excited, then comes the Gospel precept, "Believe and live"—and they do believe and live!

In the last case—that of the blind man—Christ used means as well as words, but the means were very poor ones, as we think. He spat and made clay of the spittle—and then put the clay on the man's eyes. "More likely to blind him," you say, "than to give him sight." And I have known a sermon, of which I have thought when I went home, "I wish I had never gone into the pulpit." I have been ready to cry my eyes out about it. The Lord could not bless it—so I thought—but He did. It was from His own mouth, after all! Though I was but the clay, He put that clay on the man's eyes—even my poor rough statement of the Truth of God which seemed as if it would blind the man from seeing Him, but it did not—it opened his eyes. The Lord can use very strange means—and He does. I have known Him use means in men's conversion which I thought He could not use. And it makes one speak with bated breath about some people who seem to use very odd means to bring men to Christ. If the Lord brings them, the end may not justify the means, but, at the same time, it makes us very aware of what we say, lest we fight against God. If the Lord chooses to spit, let Him spit. And if He chooses to use clay and that seems a very strange thing to

put on blind eyes, it is better than the best ointment if Christ ordains it! So let Him do things after His own fashion, for He always does them right.

Now, which shall be the way in which He will heal you? Well, it will not matter, dear Friend, what means are used—so long as your cure is effected, God shall have the glory of it!

III. I want you to notice now, in the third place, very briefly, indeed, that THESE CURES ON THE SABBATH WERE WORKED BOTH IN AND OUT OF THE SYNAGOGUE.

The first was the man who was misbehaving himself in the synagogue. I do not say to any, “Come, and misbehave yourselves in the House of God,” but I do say, “Come anyway you can to the place where prayer is known to be made.” I would rather that a man should come to ridicule the Gospel than not come to hear it at all! Here is a man, with the devil in him, disturbing the worship in the synagogue by crying out to Jesus, “Let me alone.” Yet it was a blessing for him to be there and a great blessing for him that the devil was not quiet that morning! The devil is very crafty, but he is often a great fool and he made a huge mistake when he took to bawling out that Sabbath. Whenever I hear a man swear, I always pray for him and, I have sometimes thought, when I have heard an oath, it has been a warning bell ringing to let me know that it was time for me to pray. It is a horrible thing that men should blaspheme, curse and swear, but I believe that there would be less of these evils if all Christians prayed whenever they heard an oath, for the devil would see that it would not pay him, for, fool though he is, he has some sense left. At all events, this man was in the synagogue making a disturbance.

The next person was the man with a withered hand. He could not do any work and, beside that, it seems that he had some love for the House of God and there Christ picked him out and blessed him. The woman who was bent double was also there. I like the idea of her going to the synagogue. No doubt it was a trouble for her to walk and she was a very pitiable object—yet she loved the place. I believe she was a gracious woman, for it was said of her as it is not said of others, “she glorified God” when she was made straight. Never mind what your infirmity is, dear Friends, be sure to come to the House of God. There was a dear Sister who used to sit on my left hand, here, and who did not hear a word I said, for she was deaf. But she always came because, she said, she thought it was a good example to those who were round about her to come and sit here. Besides, she said, somebody told her what hymn we were singing and she could join in that. And so, to the day of her death, she was still here. Yes, we love the place where God deigns to meet with His people and we hope to get a blessing there, somehow or other, as this poor woman did.

But the other three people healed in these Sabbath miracles were not in the synagogue. The man with the dropsy was cured after synagogue hours. The Lord Jesus Christ had gone to eat bread with a certain Pharisee and it was then that He saw this poor man. O dear Friends, may the Lord bless you after the service is over, if He does not bless you while the service is going on! May He bless you at your meal! You who love the Lord, pray Him to bless men and women when they are sitting at their supper, tonight, after the sermon is over, and they have gone home and have not, perhaps, felt the power of the Word. God can bless them even there, as this poor dropsied man received his cure when the Sabbath services were over and he had gone to his evening meal!

The next case, I think, was early Whether it was or not, does not matter, for it was the case of a man who could not go to the synagogue. He had the palsy, he could not even step into the healing bath, so I know that he could not go to the synagogue—yet the Lord came and healed him. Pray, dear Friends, for the sick folk at home and, when you are, yourselves, ill, do not think that you are shut out from Christ because you are shut out from the public means of Grace! The Lord can come and bless you wherever you are! Oh, what a Savior my Master is! If you cannot come to His House, He can come to your house! If you cannot go to the synagogue, He can come and make a temple of your little chamber and save you there!

As for the blind man, he was not in the synagogue, but he used to go, for we read that they cast him from the synagogue, so he must have been formerly in it. But on that occasion he was not there. I wonder whether the reason was because he was too poor. His neighbors asked, “Is not this he that sat and begged?” Perhaps he did not like to go because he had not fit clothes to go in. I

always think it is a very sad thing that people should make that excuse. I do not care what clothes you come in—the only clothes that are unfit to wear are those that you have not paid for! Let our clothes be ever so poor, or ever so mean, do not stay away from the House of God on that account, but come and listen to the Gospel. But if it really is the case that you cannot come, what a mercy it is that God can bless the poor who do not come to His House—for He can go to them.

Perhaps He means somebody who is here tonight—some dear child of His—to call in, on the road home, to see some poor person who has not come because he says that he has not fit clothes. Knock at his door and say, “Our minister was saying, this evening, that some people did not come to God’s House because they thought they had not fit clothes, and his words brought you to my mind. He said that God could bless them at home. I thought that, perhaps, the Lord might bless you through me. Let me tell you about Jesus Christ for a few minutes. I won’t tire you. Then let me pray with you before I go.” Why, who knows? Perhaps, this very night, you may be a messenger of mercy to some poor creature of that kind.

IV. Now I close with what might have been the whole of my sermon, for there is enough in this last division to preach from for a month. It is a very singular thing that all these Sabbath cures were cures of PERSONS WHO DID NOT ASK TO BE HEALED. They were all instances of free, Sovereign Grace giving blessing to those who did not crave it.

The first one did not ask for it, but entreated Christ to leave him alone, yet he was healed. The next, the man with the withered hand, I suppose did not even think of it till Christ said, “Stand forth.” And then he stood forth and his hand was restored. The next, the poor woman who had been bent double for 18 years, I should think that she did not hope for such a thing. Certainly, she did not say a word about it, but, to her astonishment, mercy burst upon her with these words, “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.” What a surprise it was to her, as the Grace of God often is when it dispels man’s despair! The drowsied man did not ask for healing, but Christ took him and healed him, and sent him on his way. As for the paralytic man, he had not nerve enough left to ask. Christ had to ask him, “Will you be made whole?” And then the blind man, he also, perhaps, had never dreamed of such a thing, for he expressed his own astonishment—“Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.” They did not ask for the blessing, yet they received it.

Well, what is the inference from all that I have been saying? Why, that you who ask for the blessing shall receive it, for if Christ goes to those who do

not you who have been asking—asking for days and perhaps for months, may well

pluck up courage and expect His mercy—and you shall have it. Why, if a man in the street gives alms to a poor beggar who did not ask anything of him, the boy at the crossing will be touching his hat to him, I am sure, and following him all across the road, for he is sure of getting something! He says, “He gave to that fellow who did not ask. Surely he will give to me if I do ask” Oh, believe that it must be so with you if you ask of the Lord Jesus Christ! Surely you seekers shall be finders.

The next inference I draw is this. What a mercy that we are able, sometimes, to bring into the House of God some who have never asked God to bless them. Have you brought in any tonight? If you have not, you know that you ought to do it, for it is the duty of Christians to be constantly bringing in outsiders where God gives a blessing. Some of you have brought others. Well, then, if the Lord Jesus Christ spontaneously blessed those people who seemed to be there by accident, much more will He bless those whom you have brought to His House and for whom you are now praying that He would bless them. Do not say, “It is of no use to bring in such-and-such, he is not at all seriously inclined.” That is the very person to bring in! Those who are seriously inclined will come of themselves—you are to bring those who do not have any desire to come! It is grand work to be plowing virgin soil that has never been broken up before. It is a great mercy to speak into an ear that has not been stopped up with Gospel wax, an ear that listens to the Gospel as a thing that is fresh and new, and which comes with startling novelty to the soul. Bring in people of that sort! Remember that we do not trust in their power—our trust is in the power of Almighty Grace! We do

not trust in their coming here to seek Christ—our trust is in the fact that “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost!”

As for you who have never trusted the Savior, all you have to do is to cast yourselves, with all your weight of sin, upon the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I solemnly charge you to take heed that you do not neglect it. Beware lest while you are thinking about it, the moments should steal away and hope should steal away with the moments. Some of you have come here a good many Sabbath nights hoping to lay hold on Christ—leave your hoping and lay hold on Jesus! May the blessed Spirit now bid you stretch out that withered hand and grasp eternal life! It is within reach of everyone who desires to have it—it may be yours, now, if you trust Him who brings it to you. But do not, I pray you, continue longer in unbelief. If you do, I think I know what will happen to you. You will begin to say, “There is no hope for me.” And then you will leave off coming to hear the Gospel and then what is likely to become of you?

As I look at some of my hearers, I might well settle my countenance, as Elisha did when he looked on Hazael. He could not bear to think of all that the man would do—and when the man himself heard the prophecy, he said, “Is your servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” Yes, he was dog enough to do even that! A Friend was speaking to me of an unhappy man whose life has been one of licentiousness and crime—and who has gone away from his country—he used to sit by his wife’s side in this house and he said that he would one day turn over a new leaf. But then he did not yield himself to Christ. So, when he did turn over a new leaf, it was a blacker one than he had ever turned over, before, and, unless you repent, some of you will do the same as that man did. God bless and save you, dear Friends, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.