

GOD'S THIRD-CLASS PASSENGERS

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"But Simon's wife `s mother lay sick of a fever And he [Jesus] came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them" (Mark 1:30-31).

One day when people traveled widely by stagecoach, a man went to purchase a ticket. He was asked if he wished to travel by first, second, or third class. He looked at the coach to ascertain that all the seats were identical and decided to travel third-class. As the coach rolled along the dusty road, he rejoiced over the way he had saved money. Other people who had paid more were no better off than he. As they approached a steep hill the horses decreased their speed, and the coach came to a halt. The driver jumped down from his seat, opened the door, and said, "First class passengers, keep your seats; second class passengers, get out and walk; third class passengers, get behind and push!"

There are many hills along the road of life, and the church needs members who will "get behind and push." Many people see the blue skies of promise and appreciate the scenery, but unfortunately they never use their muscles. They are content to let their fellow-passengers "get up, get out, and push!" Without the dedicated efforts of energetic Christians, the church "coach" would never move. It is interesting to consider the emphasis which the New Testament placed on the hands and arms of people healed by the Savior, If the eyes spoke of enlightenment and the feet as the means of walking with God, the hands suggested the service which might have been rendered to the Lord. Three notable examples invite investigation.

The Man Who Did Not Work (Luke 6:6)

"And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered." The author of the third Gospel was Luke, the beloved physician, and throughout his writings are evidences of authorship. As a doctor accustomed to making notes about his patients, he often included details which seemed insignificant. Here, he stated the man's problem was in his right hand. Webster's Dictionary describes palsy as "paralysis in any part of the body, sometimes accompanied by involuntary tremors . . . a shaking palsy, a chronic degenerative disease of the central nervous system characterized by tremors, muscular rigidity, weakness and a masklike expression." It

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is important to remember the afflicted man did not go to the synagogue to meet the Savior; he was already present when Jesus arrived. Probably he was known to most of the congregation. At first his uncontrollable movements and his twitching arms and legs disturbed the proceedings and annoyed the listeners. The Pharisees saw the fellow and wondered if he could be used in their efforts to humiliate the Lord. It is not known whether the afflicted man was cognizant of their scheme. His presence in the synagogue suggested three questions: (1) Was he there to worship Jehovah who apparently had permitted his misfortune? (2) Did he attend, hoping his affliction would arouse sympathy and produce charitable gifts? (3) Did the critics of Christ arrange his attendance so that he could be used in their questioning of Jesus?

It might be impossible to discern the true reason for the man's presence that day. but the Scriptures explain that his right hand was completely useless. He could see and understand, walk and approach the synagogue, sing and appreciate the psalms, but he was unable to use his right hand! He remained motionless while others did what needed to be done. It was an electrifying moment when

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Jesus said. "Stretch forth thine hand." Luke records "And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other" (Luke 6:10). The amazing miracle opened a door of unprecedented opportunity. Gratitude was expected, thanks were necessary, and service of varying kinds became possible. Unfortunately, none of these were mentioned by Luke. The man with the restored hand disappeared into oblivion. When in later days he used his hand, he served himself and not Christ. It was never recorded that he became a disciple of Jesus; he was content doing nothing! If he considered his attitude, he probably excused himself, not desiring to become involved in anything controversial. He would always be grateful to Jesus of Nazareth, but there were other men who were more capable in serving the itinerant Preacher. In one way or another he had paid for his transportation to heaven—let others get Out and push!

The Mercenary Who Did Not Worship (Acts 3:2-8)

"And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have

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give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God."

That beggar was probably one of the shrewdest men mentioned in the New Testament. His eyes were speculative, and he was a gifted actor. The place of his employment revealed he was a very astute operator. All beggars were not poor; some were wealthy because they appeared to be impoverished. To obtain a more intimate knowledge of the man who met Peter and John, it is necessary to consider certain facts. The beggar was over forty years of age (see Acts 4:22), and since even the children beg for money in the countries of the Middle East, this man had begged for the greater part of his life and was experienced in his profession. His facial expressions could influence even the most cynical observers. He could be pathetic or pleasant as occasion demanded.

The fellow could have solicited aid anywhere in Jerusalem. but he chose to operate at the gate of the temple. The reasons for his actions were obvious. Within the temple precincts were many attractions, and many of the visitors entered at the gate called Beautiful. Crowds of people were either entering or leaving, and the shrewd beggar realized worshipers would probably be generous. Every morning he arrived early, and he never departed until the gates closed. That was his daily occupation and counting money his greatest delight.

He seldom entered the temple, for that would have demanded time and a loss of an opportunity to solicit financial aid. From a distance he may have listened to the singing of the Levites, but their songs were never as attractive as the jingling of his coins. The lame man often saw the priests walking through the gate and possibly passed the time of day with them, but he seldom coveted their prayers. If he ever placed a coin in the treasury, he considered himself indispensable to the ongoing work of Jehovah. He was only interested in the end of services when, once again, possible donors would approach the gate. He had no desire to worship. He lived on the outside!

Then one day he saw two strangers approaching and instantly became alert. "Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth

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rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up (Acts 3:6-7). That which followed almost defied description. New life flooded his body, and a strange power appeared to be operating upon his legs. Grasping the outstretched hand of his unknown Benefactor, the man rose to his feet and "entered with them, into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." His life was completely transformed. There is no record that he ever appealed for alms again. His praises shattered the dignity of the sanctuary, and as astonished worshipers gathered around, the excited man continued his noisy outbursts. The following day when Peter and John were brought before the authorities, the beggar was with them (see Acts 4:14), but there, unfortunately, his story terminated. It would be illuminating to know what happened in the months that followed his remarkable recovery. Did he associate with the church and become one of the saints who went everywhere preaching the gospel? If that were true, Luke would have recorded those facts. His silence created doubts. Did the man spend his time in the sanctuary and forget other beggars who had been less fortunate? He resembled the man in the stagecoach. He was able and willing to walk, for he was with the apostles the day after the miracle. Yet there is no evidence that he joined other Christians in propelling the gospel chariot in its onward and uphill course. "Getting behind to push" was hard work, and he was unaccustomed to such labor.

My wife was very interested when a stranger said, "Mrs. Powell, your husband came to preach in my church. I had been a member there for many years. When the meetings terminated, I said to myself, 'I have been here for years, but there must be something more than I possess.' There was, and I found it. I am now an active member of The Gideons." His eyes reflected the warmth of his soul. He had become one of God's Third Class Passengers!

The Mother Who Did Not Wait (Mark 1:30-31)

"But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him [Jesus] of her. And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them."

It was the sabbath day in Capernaum and the people were leaving the synagogue. They had watched as Jesus of Nazareth expelled a demon from one of the congregation. Within sight of the Sea of Galilee they discussed what had been witnessed. Standing nearby

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was Simon, the son of Jonah (see Matt. 16:17), but his thoughts were occupied with a different matter. The time for the evening meal was approaching, and Jesus needed an invitation to dine. Perhaps Peter thought of his mother-in-law who was sick, but it seems probable he was more interested in what he could do for the Lord than in what Christ might do for him. Under ordinary circumstances no wife would be pleased to welcome five unexpected guests to dinner when her sick mother needed attention. To say the least, Simon was not famous for his consideration of others. He was a man motivated by impulses. He acted in haste and repented at leisure!

Simon's partner probably understood her husband and knew arguments and complaints would be useless. She asked them to be seated and arranged five extra places at the table. During the following moments someone thought of the mother in the bedroom, and "anon they tell him of her." Luke's account of this event is more informative. "And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great

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fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them" (Luke 4:38-39). The Pulpit Commentary on Mark says: "There were marshes in that district, hence the prevalence of fevers of a malignant character."

It is not difficult to imagine what that mother thought when she heard of the arrival of five guests and saw the worried look on the face of her daughter. Evidently someone within the home possessed faith, for it was written, "they besought him for her." The wisest way to handle any problem is to share it with Christ. He always knows what to do! When Jesus entered the bedroom to bring relief to the stricken lady, her soul was truly thrilled, but the resolution already forming within her mind was sensational. Her exit from the bedroom to the kitchen was accomplished in record time. If the members of her family advised caution and urged her to rest, she pushed them aside, saying, "Get out of my way. I have work to do... and immediately she arose and ministered unto them" Martha of Bethany would have admired her! Love is always expressed in faithful service. That woman's experiences might be summarized under four headings: (1) her difficulty; (2) her deliverance; (3) her determination; and (4) her delight. People who remain motionless when the Savior needs assistance are not true Christians. When that mother entered the kitchen she transformed the entire place. Not

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only her right hand, but every part of her body desired to serve her marvelous Benefactor. That wonderful mother-in-law worked so hard, that had she been in the stagecoach on the hill— even the horses might not have been necessary!

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