

Shut In

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the spiritual significance and blessings of being a 'shut-in', highlighting their unique ministry and the importance of community support.

Scripture: Psalm 34:18, Psalm 91:1, Isaiah 40:31, Matthew 25:40, John 14:27, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:13, Hebrews 13:3, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Faith in Suffering", "Ministry of the Shut-Ins"

Description

J.R. Miller's sermon 'Shut In' reflects on the lives of those who are physically confined due to illness, emphasizing that their condition can be a source of peace and joy rather than despair. He draws parallels between these 'shut-ins' and Noah, who was safely enclosed in the ark by God's design, suggesting that such confinement can lead to a deeper communion with Christ and a unique ministry of love and patience. Miller encourages the church to recognize the spiritual contributions of these individuals, who, despite their limitations, can profoundly impact their communities through their faith and resilience. He highlights the importance of reaching out to these individuals, offering support and companionship, as a way of serving Christ Himself.

Transcript

"A little bird I am,
Shut from the fields of air,
And in my cage I sit and sing
To Him who placed me there,
Well pleased a prisoner to be,
Because, my God, it pleases Thee."

--Guyon

In a midsummer business-letter to a lady whose pen writes many bright things for children's papers, the writer, not knowing of her invalidism, expressed the hope that his correspondent might be enjoying a pleasant and restful vacation. In the allusion to this wish, in her reply, there was a touching pathos, though

there was not a word of complaint. She wrote: "I am always an invalid, and my vacation consists only in lying down in another place." She is one of the Lord's prisoners. Yet there is no gloom in her prison; her faith fills it with brightness. It is a chamber of peace; the voice of song is heard in it. Her "vacation consists only in lying down in another place," but always the Lord her Shepherd, makes her "to lie down in green pastures." Nor is she cut off from the joy of serving Christ--but is permitted in her quiet sanctuary--to do many beautiful things for him, blessing many a life out in the sunshine by her loving ministry within her doors. She can sing again with Guyon,

"My cage confines me round:

Abroad I cannot fly;

But, though my wing is closely bound,

My heart's at liberty.

My prison-walls cannot control

The flight, the freedom, of my soul!"

There are many people who belong to the "shut-ins." They are found in fine city mansions--and in quiet country homes, in the dwellings of the rich--and in the cottages of the poor. They are invalids who because of their broken health, cannot any longer run the race with the swift or fight the battle with the strong; they have been wounded in the strife, and have fallen out of the ranks. Passers-by on the street sometimes see their faces at the window, white and bearing masks of suffering--but they no longer mingle with the hurrying throngs, nor take their places with the busy toilers. They are "shut in."

They represent many degrees of invalidism. Some of them are almost entirely helpless. Here is one who for many years has not lifted a hand nor moved a finger by her own volition; here is one only partially powerless, unable to walk--but having the use of hands and arms; another has not sufficient strength for any active out-door duty--but can move about the house and perform many a sweet ministry of love. Thus these "shut-ins" embrace all degrees of suffering and of helplessness--but they are alike in their inability to join the ranks of the busy workers outside. They must stay in-doors; in a sense, they are prisoners in this great bright world--no longer free to go where they would or to do what they earnestly crave to do.

This book may find its way into the hands of some of these "shut-ins," and it ought to have its message for them. The message ought also to be one of cheer and gladness. I would like to write for such "prisoners of the Lord" a word that may carry comfort and strength, that may be to them like a little flower sent in from the outside, a token of sympathy, laden also with fragrance from the garden of the Lord.

In the account of the entering of Noah into the ark, before the Flood came, we read that "the Lord shut him in." For almost a year Noah and his family were "shut-ins," but it must have been a comfort for them to know that the shutting of the door was not accidental--that the Lord had done it. There was another comfort: it was very much better inside--than outside. Outside, there were great storms, wild torrents and terrible destruction! No man could live in the rushing waters. Within, there was perfect safety. Not a drop of rain dashed in; no wild tempest swept through the door. The ark was a chamber of peace floating quietly and securely in the midst of the most terrible ruin the world ever saw! The Lord's shutting in of his people--was to save them.

May we not say of every shut-in child of God, "The Lord shut him in"? What the Lord does for his own people--can never be unkindness, whatever it may seem to be. It is an infinite comfort, therefore, to a Christian who is kept within-doors by invalidism or other like cause, to be able to say, "It was the Lord who shut me in!"

May we not go a step farther and say of such "shut-ins", that the Lord has shut them in--because it is better for them to be within--than without? No doubt there is protection in such a condition. These prisoners of the Lord are not exposed to the storms; it is always warm and safe where they are. They are dwelling under the shadow of God's wing. They miss many of the struggles with temptation, and many of the sterner conflicts of life--by being shut in. The ark was guided by an unseen Hand over the trackless waters of the Deluge. It had no rudder, no pilot, no sail, no chart--yet it struck no rock, was whelmed in no wild billows, moved in no wrong course, and bore its "shut-ins" in safety to the shores of a new world. May we not say that in like manner all the "shut-ins" of God's people--are God's special care? Are they not of those whom he gathers in his arms--and carries in his bosom?

We are told that the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation; may we not say that one of the ways he delivers from temptation, is by shutting his people away from the rough blasts? No doubt many a soul has been saved from the evil influences of worldliness, by being called from the midst of the excitements and strifes of active life--into the quiet shelter of invalidism. The chamber of suffering--proves a sanctuary rather than a prison.

But there are other comforts. It is a great deal better to be shut in--than to be shut out. There are pictures of both classes in the New Testament. In one of the parables of our Lord, the door was shut--and it excluded some who came too late to be admitted; but the same door also shut in with Christ those who had entered in time. No condition could be more suggestive of blessedness, than to be shut in with the Master. The closed doors are pledge that there can be no interruption of the communion. Christ's "shut-ins" have abundant opportunity for loving fellowship with him. Their sick-rooms are not prisons--but Bethels where Christ comes to meet with them and to bless them!

It is not strange, therefore, that many of the quiet rooms where Christ's disciples are shut in, are places of great joy. Faith triumphs over pain. The darkness brings out the stars of promise, and they shine in radiant beauty. Because of infirmity, the power of Christ rests in especial measure upon his suffering ones, and they are enabled to rejoice in their very tribulations. Their joy is rich and deep! It is not the rippling surface-happiness of those outside who have no pain and are free to go where they will, and to do as they desire: it is heart-joy which does not depend upon external things, and is therefore unaffected by external experiences. There are fresh-water springs that bubble up beneath the edge of the sea; the brackish tides roll over them--but they remain as sweet and fresh as ever. Like these springs, are the fountains of Christian joy. Under the billows of trial and suffering, they flow on unwasting and unembittered.

Many Christian invalids become almost marvels of patience and peace--as they are brought into living communion with Christ. They are never heard complaining; they believe in the love of God, submit themselves to his will, and take pain from his hand as confidently and sweetly--as they take medicine from their trusted physicians; their faces shine with the radiance of indwelling peace, and the joy of their hearts finds expression in words and songs of praise. Surely, to the angels, as they look down from their pure glory--the chambers in which many of Christ's "shut-ins" lie, must appear as spots of bright beauty in this dark world.

We naturally suppose that when people are laid aside by illness and shut away in quiet sick-rooms, that their work ceases, and their usefulness is at an end. After that they are a burden to others--instead of being helpers. So we would suppose. They require tending, watching, nursing; probably they have to be lifted by their friends and carried from chair to bed, from room to room, up and down stairs; they can no longer take any part in the duty of the household nor perform any active service for the Master. We would say at first thought that they are no longer useful; their old-time work has dropped from their hands, and others now have to do it. Yet we greatly mistake when we suppose they are no longer of any service: they have a ministry even in their suffering which in many cases exceed in value, their highest usefulness in their most active days. It is impossible to measure the influence in a home, day after day, of a patient, rejoicing Christian sufferer. There pours out from the sick-room of such a "shut-in" a spiritual warmth of love which diffuses itself through all the household life, like a summer atmosphere, leaving blessing everywhere.

It was my privilege to visit very often a Christian young woman, who for years was a sufferer. Much of the time her pain was excruciating--almost unendurable; but as I watched her from week to week, I saw continually the putting forth of new spiritual beauties in her character. Her young life seemed to me like a lovely rose-bush in early summer, with its many opening buds, and pain was as the summer warmth that caused the buds to burst into full, rich beauty and fragrance. Every time I saw her--some new feature of Christlikeness appeared in her life: another rose had opened into full bloom! In her last months there was no opportunity for active service--yet I believe the good she wrought by her ministry of pain--far surpassed that which she could have done in the same time with the busiest hands had she lived in painless health. By her suffering, she touched the hearts of parents and friends, and drew out their sympathy as they watched month after month beside her. These fruits of her pain will remain as permanent enrichment of the characters of those who loved her.

Another effect of her suffering was in the influence of her sweet patience. She never murmured; her faith was never clouded for an instant; she was gentle, thoughtful, joyous, even in the sorest pain. Thus she was preaching perpetually sermons without words--on the power of the love and grace of God--and thus became a blessing to everyone who entered her room and looked upon her radiant face.

From very humble life, there comes this moving incident which illustrates the same truth: In a pottery, there was a workman who had one small invalid child at home. The man wrought at his trade with exemplary fidelity. He managed, however, to bear each evening to the bedside of his "wee lad" a flower, a bit of ribbon, or a fragment of crimson glass--anything that would give color to the room. He never went home at night without something that would make the wan face light up with joy at his return. He never said that he loved his boy, and yet he went on patiently loving him, until the whole pottery shop had been drawn into real though unconscious fellowship with him. The workmen made curious little jars and cups, and painted little pictures on them, and burnt them in their kilns. One brought some fruit and another some engravings in a scrapbook. Not one of them whispered a word, for this solemn thing was not to be talked about. They put their little gifts in the old man's hat--and he found them there and understood it all. The entire pottery-shop, full of men of rather coarse fibre by nature--grew quiet as the months passed, becoming gentle and kind; some dropped swearing as the weary look on their patient fellow-worker's face told them beyond mistake--that the inevitable shadow was drawing nearer.

Every day someone did a piece of work for him, so that he could come later to work--and leave earlier. And when the bell tolled and the little coffin came out of the lonely door, there stood a hundred stalwart workmen from the pottery, with their clean clothes on, losing their half-day's pay from work, for the

privilege of following to the grave, that little child whom probably not one of them had ever seen!

These incidents illustrate the refining, softening influence that went out from even a child's sickroom and touched a hundred men. All over the country there are other chambers of suffering from which there goes out continually a power that makes men and women quieter, gentler, more thoughtful and kind. Thus God's "shut-ins" are means of grace oftentimes, to whole communities.

It is known to many that there is a most helpful system of communication established among invalids over this country. Without any formal organization the following objects are aimed at:

1. To relieve the weariness of the sick-room by sending and receiving letters and other tokens of remembrance;
2. To testify of the love and presence of Christ in suffering and privation;
3. To pray for one another at set times--daily at twilight hour, and weekly on Tuesday morning at ten o'clock;
4. To stimulate faith, hope, patience and courage in fellow-sufferers, by the study and presentation of Bible promises.

This simple exchanging of consolation among hundreds and thousands of "shut-ins" throughout the country, is in itself a ministry whose helpfulness never can be estimated. Whatever tender comfort one finds is passed to others that they may share it. Strong friendships are formed between those who have never met. The hearts of all the great scattered company are drawn into loving sympathy--as they think of and pray for one another.

Those who are happy and strong, rejoicing in health and in physical freedom, should never forget these "shut-ins." There are one or more of them, in every community. There are many ways in which strength and comfort may be sent to them. A kindly letter now and then, full of cheer and affection--may be like an angel's visit to a weary sufferer! Or the thoughtfulness may be shown by sending a book, or some flowers, or a little basket of fruit, or other token of love. In some cases personal visits are also much appreciated. There is some way, at least, in which everyone may do a little to lighten the burden of invalidism in some weary sufferer; and surely of all such Jesus will say, "You did it unto me!"

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jr-miller/shut-in/>

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