

Unto His Nest Again

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking answers from Christ and trusting in His love and power to overcome spiritual depression.

Scripture: Matthew 11:2

Topics: "Restoration", "Faith in Doubt"

Description

J.R. Miller reflects on the story of President Lincoln rescuing a fallen bird, drawing a parallel to Christ's mission of restoring lost souls to faith and love. He discusses John the Baptist's moment of doubt while imprisoned, emphasizing that even the strongest believers can experience spiritual discouragement. Miller encourages believers to bring their doubts and fears to Christ, who responds with patience and love, rather than impatience. He highlights that true faith often emerges from trials and that the love of God remains constant, even in times of uncertainty. Ultimately, he urges the faithful to rebuild their nests of trust and peace in Christ, despite life's challenges.

Transcript

One day President Lincoln and a friend were walking together in a field, when they found a little bird fluttering in the grass. It had fallen out of its nest in the bushes, and could not get back again. The great, gentle-hearted man stopped in his walk, stooped down, picked up the little thing, and put it back into its place. If it was a noble deed for a great man--to lift a fluttering bird back into its place. If even helping one fainting robin unto its nest again, redeems a life from uselessness, what work of high honor is it to help back a fainting human soul into its nest of faith and love in the bosom of Christ! That is the work Christ is doing continually. That is what He wants us to do in His name, when we find a soul that has fallen out of the nest of trust and peace.

John the Baptist had fallen out of his nest of confidence. This seems very strange to us. We remember his noble words as he foretold the Messiah, then as he pointed Him out to his disciples and spoke of His glory. We remember his sublime courage, when he faced the terrible Herod--and reprovved him for his sin. Is it possible that a shadow of doubt ever came over his sky? Yet listen to the question which his disciples are sent to ask Jesus: "Are you the one who was to come--or do we look for another?" Why should such heroic faith as we see in John by the Jordan--be changed to doubt and fear a few months later?

We must remember John's circumstances. For a few months, multitudes flocked to hear him preach, and then the throngs melted away. His mission was only to prepare the way for Christ; and when Christ

came--John paled as the morning star pales before the sunrise. It is hard to be forgotten by those--who a little while ago sang one's praises. Then, John was now in prison in one of the gloomiest dungeons ever built, in one of the most desolate places of the earth. To any man, such a prison must have had its dreadful horrors--but to John, this imprisonment must have been an unspeakable bitterness. He had lived in the freedom of the mountains and the deserts, breathing the air of heaven and gazing up by night at the stars. Worse than death to this untamed, passionate spirit--was this dungeon. No wonder that, shut up in its desolate dungeon, this great eagle soul began to lose its majestic courage.

Meanwhile, to his prison, there came fragmentary reports of the ministry of Jesus. He was very popular. Throngs followed Him. He wrought many miracles. But why was His forerunner left unhelped, undelivered, in this dark dungeon? He had been faithful to Jesus; why did not Jesus come and open these prison doors for him? Among so many mighty miracles, could not one be wrought to release him? Was it just, was it right that he should be neglected here, in the darkness and the wretchedness, while Jesus was in the midst of such honor? Perhaps such questions arose in the mind of John, as he lay in his dungeon and heard of the works of Jesus. Is it any wonder that the eye of the caged eagle began to film over?

There are true Christians in every age, who have had their times of spiritual discouragement. No doubt a child of God should always rejoice. Yet some of the holiest saints who ever lived, have had experiences of disheartenment. What earnest soul is there, who never finds in the passionate supplication and longing of the forty-second Psalm, its own liturgy of longing? "My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?' These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng."

There are many causes which may produce spiritual depression.

Some people have gloomy temperaments. They live in the valleys, and the valleys do not catch the morning sunshine until long after the mountain tops have been gilded. Thus Thomas was the last of the disciples to get the joy of the resurrection. This same disposition keeps many good Christian people much of the time in the shadows.

Sometimes sickness is the cause of despondent feelings. Ofttimes people whose faith is ordinarily bright and clear--are cast into gloom when there is no spiritual reason whatever, solely by their physical condition!

Sore trials sometimes cause the clouding of faith. Peter wrote: "You are in heaviness through manifold trials."

Sometimes, in the sharpness and in the continuance of affliction, the heart grows weary and is thrown out of its nest of peace.

Or there may be mental perplexities caused by questionings that receive no answer.

These are a few of the causes which tend to produce spiritual disheartenment, and lead good people to ask whether or not Jesus is the Savior and the Friend they had supposed Him to be. We all know that we do not need to have these doubts and fears--that we should never be shaken for a moment, out of our nest of confidence and peace. The word of God is, "You will keep him in perfect peace--whose mind is stayed on You." Amid all trials, gloom, sorrows, mysteries, questionings, there is one blessed truth on

which we may rest--the unfailing love of God for His people.

Yet, we are all human, and weak because human. The strongest of us may be swept away for a time, from our refuge--or at least may lose the full joy of our Christian hope.

What should we do in such experiences? We have the answer in the example of John. He sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him plainly, "Are you the one who was to come--or should we look for another?" Instead of nursing his questionings in the gloom of his dungeon, he laid them at once before Christ. That is what we should do with all our fears and perplexities--take them to Christ! No other can answer them so well as He can. No other will answer them so gladly, so wisely, so lovingly! He was not impatient with John when he sent to ask his question. Godly men are sometimes impatient with any who have doubts, or who are swept away from their moorings. But Jesus never was. With unbelief--He had no sympathy. He not only was amazed at men's unbelief, it angered Him. But with doubt, or sincere questioning, He had infinite patience.

Mark well the distinction between doubt and unbelief. Said a recent writer:

"Doubt is can't believe; unbelief is won't believe.

Doubt is honesty; unbelief is obstinacy.

Doubt is looking for light; unbelief is content with the darkness."

Jesus severely reproved unbelief; but when any one came to Him with questionings, seeking light, desiring to find the truth--He dealt with him with wondrous gentleness. He sat down and talked with Nicodemus. He showed Thomas the wounds in His hands and feet. He let John know the beautiful work he was doing. He is the same today. If we have questionings or fears--we may be sure of most patient, gentle dealing--if we bring them to Him. He will never chide; He will teach us what we want to know.

Our Lord's own word is always comforting and assuring, "You do not realize now what I am doing--but later you will understand." It is faith we need. Faith is believing when we cannot see. Wait a little longer--and all the sad mystery shall be cleared away!

A tourist tells of sailing out of the muddy waters of Lake Huron--into the crystal waters of Lake Superior. When night came on, the vessel was in Lake Huron, and his eye could not penetrate beneath the surface. Rising in the morning he came on deck, and, looking over the prow, he was surprised to find how clear the water was, through which the vessel was moving. He could see the great jagged rocks, and it seemed as if the keel would strike upon them. In reality, however, they were fifty or sixty feet below the surface. The water was so clear--that the depth appeared to be only a few feet.

We are moving now through dark, cloudy waters. Impenetrable mysteries surround us. We cannot understand the things that befall us; we cannot comprehend the deep things of God, of Christ, of the Bible, and of Providence. But as we move on, we shall pass at length, out of the obscurities and mysteries--into the clear, crystal knowledge of heaven! It is said in Revelation, that there shall be no more sea in heaven. To the ancients, the sea was the emblem of mystery. To say there shall be no sea in heaven--means that there shall be no mystery there. All that here is dark and strange--shall there be made clear!

The comfort Christ gives to those who come to Him with their doubts and fears, may not be the removal of the things that cause the darkness. John was not released from prison after he had sent his disciples to

Jesus. Jesus did not go and tear down the frowning walls that shut His friend away in the gloom. John was left there, and shortly died as a martyr. But when the messengers returned and told their master what they had seen, and what Jesus had said to them--we may be sure John's doubts fled away, and assurance of peace came again into his heart.

Nor will Jesus now always remove the things that discourage us. But He will give us grace to believe in His love--even when we cannot see; and to wait in faith for the fuller, clearer revealing.

Indeed, sometimes the sorrows and losses that cause us so much darkness and doubt--are caused by the removing of obstacles in the way of our wider vision. There were some large lilac bushes at the window of a farmer's house. They kept out the sunshine and air, and they obstructed the view so that the mountains could not be seen. One day the farmer's axe was heard, and bush after bush was cut away. "Only a little more cutting," he said, "and we shall get it." Then the mountains could be seen from the window.

It is oftentimes thus with our earthly joys. They are very sweet--but they hide our view of the Delectable Mountains. Money is lost. Loved ones are taken from us. Earthly honors are cut off. Luxuries are swept away. Remorselessly the axe cuts into our hedgerows of beauty--and we cry out in alarm! But when the cutting is completed--we see more clearly; we have wider views; we behold lovely things we had never seen before!

One says, "I never knew the meaning of that precious text--until my trouble came." Another says, "I never loved God so much--as since He took my baby away." Another says, "I never knew what it was to trust God and rest in His love--until my money was taken away." Thus our very trials, which at the time darken the sky for us--help oftentimes to lead us to firmer faith and securer trust!

It is interesting to notice the way in which Jesus answered John's doubts. While the messengers were present, waiting for the answer, Jesus cured many people of diseases and plagues, and of evil spirits, and bestowed sight on many blind people. Then He said, "Go your way, and tell John what things you have seen and heard--the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good tidings preached to them." John had had wrong views of Christ's mission. Jesus shows him that the true glory of His Messiahship, was in its tenderness and grace, its gentle deeds, its blessings of healing and comfort, its thoughtfulness for the poor.

What was it in these works, which proved Christ's Messiahship? Was it the fact that they were supernatural? No; it was primarily the fact that they were deeds of love. We may not undervalue the supernatural in the ministry of Christ, as evidence of His divine mission. His Godhood shines out in all His life. Yet He never wrought a miracle merely for display, or to prove His divinity. The real glory of Christ--was in the divine love that wrought in and through all His miracles--as well as in His most common acts. The glory of Christ is seen today, wherever Christianity has gone. Look at the works of mercy which are wrought in Christ's name. Go among the hospitals, into asylums for the blind, refuges for orphans, and homes for the aged and for the poor. Follow the Christian workers of any true Christian church in their rounds of blessed ministry among the sick, the troubled, the sorrowing, and in their visits to the poor, the outcast, and the prisoner. Men say miracles ceased with the apostles. Well, grant it; but Christ said that His followers would do "the greater works"--and these have never ceased.

The power of Christ is working in His church today--as really as ever it did! It is hampered and hindered, and oftentimes balked of its loving purpose, by the imperfection of the lives of those who represent Christ; the grace of Christ loses much of its sweetness and its power in its transmission through the poor human

lives which are the lines of communication between God and the world. Yet with all that is imperfect in the church--God's glory is flowing everywhere, and the world is being blessed!

There is a practical lesson which we should not fail to take in passing. If we would give the world evidence that Christianity is divine--we must do as Jesus did, when He would answer John's question. We are not called to open blind eyes, to unstop deaf ears, to heal the lame, to raise the dead; but we are called to be loving and sympathetic, comforters of sorrow, friends to the widow and orphan, and a blessing to every life which touches ours.

One who had been a student of theology writes, "One of my beloved professors had been giving us a very able lecture upon some of those hard questions of Biblical criticism--questions which somewhat induced doubt and tended to unsettle. But it so happened that that very afternoon, when the lecture was over, I had to minister nearby. I had something there to do which checked and corrected all unsettling effects of Biblical criticism. I had to go into one house where, upon the only table in the room, there was a long coffin, with two small coffins beside it. The mother had died suddenly, and two little children also had died within the same day. As I stood there, all notion of being unsettled by what I had heard an hour before, utterly vanished from me."

There is no other cure for doubt so effective--as to take up the cross of Christ and go with Him into the lanes and alleys, and amid the world's poverty, and need, sorrow, and sin--setting our feet in the prints of His shoe, and carrying His gospel into the darkest places. In doing His will--we shall learn to know of the doctrine. In trying to do His work--we shall find solution for the mysteries which perplex us. Instead, therefore, of troubling ourselves over the difficulties that men are finding, perplexing ourselves over the questions they are raising--we should turn our faces toward the world's suffering and woe, and seek to carry into it--a little of the love and grace of Christ! This is a better cure by far for our doubts and perplexities, than we can ever find in controversy and disputation.

Longfellow, in one of his poems, tells of passing through his garden and seeing a ruined bird's nest which had fallen on the ground. But when he looked up into the tree--he saw the little birds, uncomplaining, busy there among the branches, building a new nest for themselves. Here is a lesson for any who have lost the joy of their Christian faith.

The nest of trust in which they once found such sweet peace--has been torn to shreds by the storms of trial, or by the wintry winds of doubt. It seems to them, perhaps, that they can never again have the joy they once had in Christ. They are disheartened, almost in despair. But is it not worth while--to fly up again among the branches and to rebuild the torn and ruined nest? Doubt is too sad a state to stay in--even for a day. Believe in the love of God, the divinity of Christ, the atonement made on the cross, and the revelation of God in His Word. Seek to realize in your own life--the gentleness and mercy of the love of Christ. Thus you will re-build a nest of peace for your soul, and your lost joy will be restored.

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