

# Not To Be Ministered Unto

By J. H. Horsburgh, M.A.

For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (**Mark 10:45**)

A great fact is here stated concerning the Son of Man. The speaker is our Lord Himself. Who in this, as in all matters, left us an example that we should follow in His steps.

The incident that gave rise to His words is a sad one. Two of His disciples, James and John, wanted to be ministered unto by being granted the chief places in His glory (**Mark 10:35-37**). When the others heard it, they were highly indignant, for they wanted to be ministered unto by having the chief places themselves. But out of the ferment the Lord brought good. He made it an occasion to remind His disciples that they were not of the world, and that their distinguishing mark must be lowliness and readiness to serve one another.

“Jesus called them unto Him” (**Mark 10:42**). Notice the tenderness and pathos here. He had been telling the Twelve about Himself— of the awful betrayal, the cruel sufferings and indignity, the shameful death that awaited Him at Jerusalem (**Mark 10:32-34**). Surely their hearts are melted? Nay, they seem unable to think of Him. They begin to quarrel among themselves as to who should be the greatest. Picture their flushed faces, their angry tones, their violent gestures! “But Jesus called them unto Him,” and gently quelled the storm. Earthly rulers, He tells them, exercise lordship over others: “but so shall it not be among you: but whosoever desires to be great among you must be your servant, and whosoever of you desires to be first must be the bondsman of all. For even the Son of Man came NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (**Mark 10:42-45**). In a word, “Remember that you are My disciples. The disciple must be as his Master.”

Evidently this is something which closely concerns us all if we are Jesus’ disciples. It tells us something of what spirit we should have and what our life ought to be today—and every day.

The passage tells us that the Son of Man came to minister. This is a great subject. It is not that incidentally He ministered unto a few or to many; but He came to minister. It was His set purpose.

But this wonderful passage tells us something else about the Son of Man. He “came NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO.”

We are apt to slur over this, to forget it, or perhaps to pass it by altogether unnoticed. The disciples of Jesus are to be “even as the Son of Man” in coming to minister. Yes, and the disciples of Jesus are to be “even as the Son of Man” in coming “NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO.”

If a word of personal testimony may be allowed, I should like to say this. In the ups and downs, the wear and tear of daily life, there are few passages of Scripture which search me as this does. It convicts, rebukes, and condemns me. It is always finding me out. And, yet, how it encourages, quiets, strengthens, comforts, and helps me!

This desire to be ministered unto is at the bottom of disagreements in the nursery, fights in the school, quarrels amongst private individuals, wars among nations. And, alas, not only in the world is this spirit prevalent, but in the Church also. As Christians we do not adequately realize—perhaps we hardly realize at all—how much of sin and failure, how much of vexation and discontent, how much of peevishness and irritability, how much of discord and unhappiness in our lives, is due to our DESIRE TO BE MINISTERED UNTO instead of coming *not* to be ministered unto.

Are we not too often cross, vexed, rasped, indignant? Sometimes we show it by a foolish exhibition of temper; sometimes we restrain ourselves, but there the nasty feeling is. And why? In all probability because we want to be ministered unto and have been disappointed.

The fact is we are always wanting to be ministered unto by people, by circumstances, by fortune (“luck” perhaps you call it), by the weather, by something. To be ministered unto is so natural, so necessary, so proper! We have been brought up to expect it. And if we are thwarted as we often are, we are apt to get cross, sulky, moody, nervous, and perhaps end by making ourselves miserable, and others too.

How different it would be if, like the Son of Man, we always “came NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO.” Take a few illustrations.

## **Are You Slighted**

You are slighted, ignored, brushed aside. Or your employer, or employee, does not show you proper consideration. Or your neighbor does not treat you with the respect which is due to your position, your abilities, your character. You feel it very much; in fact, you are upset about it. Why? Is it because you came to minister, and were deprived of the privilege? No, not that at all. It is because your feelings, your rights, your gifts, your position, your dignity, your importance were not recognized. YOU were not ministered unto. And you came to be ministered unto. Hence the storm!

## **Are You Jealous**

Or consider that most hateful thing, Jealousy. What is it? Another is praised or put before you. Another does better than you. Another is more fortunate than you. The honor, the success, the money, the popularity, the reward has gone to him. You wanted it for yourself. You came to be ministered unto. And because he has been ministered unto, and not you, you are jealous!

## **Not Right to Ignore Me**

“But it was not right,” you say, “he had no business to ignore me, to snub me, to treat me as he did. And it was most unjust; that other person ought not to have been placed over my head.”

That may be perfectly true, and we make no excuse for wrong and injustice. But you are a disciple of Jesus (I am speaking only to such), and I ask you—if you had come, like your Master, “NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, but to minister,” would you be feeling so sore and angry and jealous? The trouble is, you came to be ministered unto.

## **Not Praised**

You have been kind to someone. You have rendered him a service. It has cost you something to do it. Naturally you thought your goodness would be appreciated. And it wasn't, at least not as much as you think it ought to have been. You expected profuse thanks and quite a little fuss to be made over it; and your friend took it coolly. You are disgusted. You wish you hadn't helped him. And you feel half inclined to say in your haste you will never do anybody a kindness again! Why? You have ministered unto another: you have helped someone who was in need. Yes, but *you have not been ministered unto*. You wanted to be thought exceedingly good and kind and generous. That is to say, you expected to be ministered unto by the thanks and praise, and a little flattery too, perhaps, of the other. Yes, when we come to be ministered unto we do meet sometimes with severe shocks!

## **Not Consulted**

You are a person of excellent taste, sound judgment, good common sense. And you find your advice has been ignored—perhaps it was not even asked in a matter, too, in which you pose as an authority. You cannot understand it. You feel rubbed the wrong way. Your Spirit within you is ruffled. Your equilibrium is quite disturbed. What is the trouble? Is it that you came wanting to minister to your friend, and by neglecting to take your advice he has got himself into a sad mess? Not at all. As it happens, he has managed very nicely indeed without your help. The trouble is this: *you* have not been

acknowledged. Your reputation as an “authority” in the matter of taste or judgment has not been ministered unto. You came not to minister but to be ministered unto. And you have been disappointed!

## Are You a Public Speaker

You had been announced to speak on a special occasion. A good audience assembled, and you noticed with peculiar satisfaction that Mr. X, a well-known and influential Christian man, was present. You had a great subject, and waxed very eloquent. At the close you felt extremely pleased with yourself, and you naturally expected Mr. X to come up at once, grasp your hand, and thank you warmly “for such an able, interesting, and moving address.”

But Mr. X walked quietly out of the hall without a word! How crestfallen you were! The joy you had felt was extinguished like a snuffed-out candle! How was this? You had the opportunity of ministering to a number of people. But this was not quite what you came for. In your heart of hearts you wanted that speech to minister *unto you*. It is the old trouble again. *You came to be ministered unto.*

## About Your Work

You are a professional man, or you are a man of business. You are doing fairly well. You have enough for all your needs. But you have set your heart on great things. And your success has fallen short of your expectations. This is weighing on your mind. It is a daily trouble to you. You are feeling constantly depressed. What is really at the bottom of it? Is it that you came to minister, and you are disappointed not to be able to minister as fully as you hoped to do? No, not that. But you desire to gratify yourself more; you want to make a bigger show; to be thought more of; you covet to be rich. And your desire for these things is not gratified. *You are not ministered unto.*

## And Play

Even your recreation is disturbed by this coming-to-be-ministered-unto spirit. You went in for a race, a competition, a game. You failed; you were beaten. How “horrid” you felt! To this day that feeling haunts you.

A Cambridge athlete won a race three years in succession. If he could win it a fourth year it would be a record. And he was expected to win. But he lost! I am told that for weeks he never smiled. He wanted that race to minister to his family. He wanted people to be able to point to him and say, “He has done what nobody else has done.” And because he was not ministered unto, he was crushed.

“But,” you reply, “in our sports and competitions we are out to do our best and to win, our aim is to be ministered unto.” Yes, of course. But after all, it is only a game. And a disciple of Christ must not take his games too seriously. Even on the playing fields he can manifest the came-not-to-be-ministered-unto-but-to-minister spirit. When he is beaten he can enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that in losing he has been the means of ministering unto the winner.

## Christian Service

But to return to something more serious than sport. You are engaged in Christian work. You are a Sunday School teacher, or a District visitor or a church officer. Or perhaps you help at the Mothers’ Meeting, the Band of Hope, or the Mission Room. Now you are thinking of giving up the work. Why? Has your health failed? Have you not now the time for it? Are home duties too pressing? No, none of these is the reason. Then you are not wanted? Is there no longer need of your services? Is the opportunity to minister withdrawn from you? No, the need is as great as ever. The door of opportunity remains wide open. Then why are you giving up? Well, you are tired of the work, so you think you will drop it. You expected it would be an interest to you. It would bring you into touch with others. It would give you a position in the Church. In fact, *you thought you would like it*. And you did like it for a time, but now you are tired of it. Ah! we are beginning to understand. You thought the work would minister unto you. And as long as it ministered unto you, you were

willing to go on with it. Now that it no longer ministers unto you, you will give it up. But “the Son of Man came NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, but to minister, and to give His life... .” And are you not His disciple?

These are only a few illustrations. They may not be applicable to you. But think it out, and whatever may be your walk in life, or your relation to your fellow-men, you will be surprised to find how much of your unrest, how many of your troubles, arise from this same cause—THE DESIRE TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, instead of coming to minister.

## In The Home

You and your friend are living together. Your mutual happiness is interrupted by little jars. You are quick, and your friend is slow. You are economical, and your friend is extravagant. You are punctual, and your friend is unpunctual. You are a very tidy person, and your friend is untidy. You like everything done in your own particular way, your friend does them anyhow! So there is constant friction. But *why*? Is it because you cannot minister to your friend? No, indeed. It is because your love of tidiness or whatever it may be, your liking to have things your own way, is not ministered unto.

Or, perhaps you are the free and easy person, and you are annoyed because your happy-go-lucky way is not ministered unto!

Suppose you both try desiring NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, but to minister and to give?

It is astounding what a number of little things disturb us. Your plan for the afternoon is upset. You desire a wet day; it persists in being fine. A visitor calls just when you want to go out. You are asked to sing and your voice is husky and does not do you credit. The answer to your letter has not come. Your request is not granted. You are interrupted in the middle of an interesting book. The pen won't write. The dress doesn't fit. The fire won't burn. Something is wrong with dinner. The children are so noisy!

Sometimes everything seems wrong. There is nothing big, nothing we can lay our finger upon. But we are always coming into the world with our likes and dislikes, our whims and fancies, our wishes and hobbies, our fads and foibles. And if we are not ministered unto in these little things, we are apt to be distressed and to get put out with ourselves and with everybody else.

## The Happy Way

I am persuaded that the happiness of our lives depends enormously on the spirit in which we come afresh into the world each day. If we come to be ministered unto, we shall soon be fretting and inwardly fuming. But if we come NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, but to minister, it will be very different. “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” It is happier to minister than to be ministered unto. And it is far nobler: “Whosoever will be *chief* among you, let him be your servant.” ([Matt. 20:27](#)).

## A Word of Caution

Now for a word of caution. Our text does not say that we are to be like Stoics, that whatever happens we are not to feel it. Annoyances, rubs, disappointments—the things that we have been talking about—of course we feel them. (They would be of no use to us if we didn't feel them.) But they need not distress us. Someone has said: “You cannot prevent a crow from alighting on your head, but you can prevent its building a nest in your hair.” When we want to be ministered unto, we harbor a grievance, we exaggerate it, we give way to it, we let it build its nest and hatch its mischievous eggs. But when we desire NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, but to minister, we do not harbor the grievance, we give it no welcome, we pay it scant attention, we are too occupied to trouble about it. Let us be like Jesus. He was always too busy thinking of others, and ministering to them, to concern Himself as to whether He was being ministered unto or not. One sovereign remedy against touchiness is to be busy caring for your neighbor.

## Another Word of Caution

Again our text does not say that we are not to be ministered unto. It does not say that we are always to be slighted, never courted; that we are never to meet with success; that no reward and prizes are ever to come our way; that we are to go about the world looking for injustice, insults and ill-treatment. Nothing of the kind. There is no harm in being ministered unto. The Son of Man was often ministered unto, and He appreciated it very much. We shall often be ministered unto; perhaps all the more if we do not expect it. The harm is in *always to be ministered unto* instead of to minister: in wanting to be ministered unto: in seeking it, setting our heart upon wanting it, and in being disappointed, chagrined, ruffled and cross if we are not ministered unto.

We have lingered long talking about this failing—THE WISH TO BE MINISTERED UNTO—because it is so prevalent, its consequences are so sad, and chiefly because so many of us who are habitually guilty are unconscious of the fact.

## Self Must Die

And now for a few brief words concerning the remedy. Be well assured that at the bottom of the trouble, and in all its ramifications, is SELF. And this old enemy Self must be mortified—put to death. We must give Self no quarter. “I send you my best wishes for your birthday. I hope you are dead,” wrote one. And she was right. “I seem spoiled for everything but to see people die,” wrote another. And she was right. SELF MUST DIE.

With this fact in view, in what a different light must we regard NOT BEING MINISTERED UNTO. Welcome disappointment! Welcome hardship! Welcome slight! Welcome thorns and pricks! *These may all be turned to excellent account.* To fail in getting what we want may be a piece of good fortune! To be thwarted may be so good for us! To have our wishes crossed may be positive blessing! To be trampled upon may be a splendid thing! For every time we are not ministered unto, a fresh opportunity is given for Self to die! And the person who snubs us may well be regarded as a friend for administering to our arch enemy—SELF—a stout knock on the head! SELF MUST BE MORTIFIED. For it is only as Self dies that we can live the happy and victorious life.

## Christ Must Live

But it is not enough that Self Dies. Something else must happen. Christ must live. Self dying—Christ living. And it is in proportion as Self dies in us that Christ can live in us. Let us not then be afraid of death—death to the Self-life. It is only as Self dies and Christ lives in us that we shall be able to come fresh into the world each day “NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, but to minister,” and in our tiny measure to give our lives, to sacrifice OURSELVES, for the glory of our God and the good of our fellows.