

Soul-Winning.

(Address delivered to students in two theological colleges.)

IT is impossible to feel any interest in this subject, unless the soul is living in constant enjoyment of Christ's saving grace. A young minister, disappointed in his work, consulted another brother. He was asked, "Are you daily going back to the cross for the assurance of forgiven sin for yourself?" He confessed he was not. He discovered that this was to be the first step upon the road to useful service. If we are successfully to echo the Baptist's message, "Behold the Lamb of God!" we ourselves must retain the vision of redeeming love, as though we had just left Calvary forgiven. This preliminary preparation for evangelism is likely to be undervalued, just because it is so exceedingly evident.

The *urgency* of the work we are considering is strangely illustrated by the use of a certain word in the New Testament. When Peter fell upon his knees before Christ in the boat, after the great draught of fishes, Christ calmed His disciple with the words, "Fear not, for from henceforth thou shalt catch men." The word translated "catch"—more literally "take alive"—(R.V. margin)—is only once again used in the New Testament. Paul, writing to Timothy, speaks of those who are "taken captive" by the devil "at his will." "Taken captive" is another translation of the same word Christ used to Peter. The striking and terrible lesson for us is, that if we do not take "souls alive" for Christ and God, the Evil One will take them "alive" for himself. Surely the Holy Spirit has confined the use of the word to these two instances in Sacred Writ, that we may have this awful lesson impressed upon our souls.

If we are to become successful soul-winners in private or public, *holiness of life* is an essential qualification. How strangely this is brought out in that frequently misused sixth chapter of Isaiah! The prophet sees the Lord "sitting upon a throne." "Above it stood the seraphim." At the sight, the prophet is reminded of his sin; "Woe is me! for . . . I am a man of unclean lips." A seraph brings to him a live coal from off the altar and, with it, touches Isaiah's lips. How frequently we hear the prayer in public, that the preacher's lips may be touched with a live coal, that he may preach acceptably. How different was the use, as explained in the story! "This hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." This is

the divine preparation for acceptable service. When the iniquity was purged—but not till then—the prophet could respond to the question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” with the accents of consecration, “Here am I; send me.” Just before his last earthly journey from England to Mentone, the late C. H. Spurgeon was staying at Eastbourne. It was the privilege of the writer to have a drive with him one afternoon. Never will he forget the great preacher’s description of Paul’s parable to Timothy concerning the different vessels upon the Master’s shelves. Spurgeon pictured the good man of the house going from shelf to shelf to find a clean vessel for His use, and putting one after another back with a tear, a frown, or a sigh—they were not clean—and how, when he reached the bottom shelf, where the cheap earthenware vessels were, he found at last one that he could use. Spurgeon’s voice sounded, as one of the old prophets might, when he added, “If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master’s use.” Is it not oftentimes that the reason of the ill success of Christian workers is to be found, not in their lack of Bible knowledge, or of diligent preparation for their work, but in the ill tempers in the home, or the lack of strict truthfulness in the business.

A late Principal of one of our theological colleges used to say to his students, “Gentlemen, *you* can never win souls.” At first it seemed a reflection upon the “batch” of men before him, but a little thought showed the words to express what is a deep underlying principle in soul-winning, i.e. *total abandonment of self-confidence*. Just so long as there is any lingering thought of leaning on anything in ourselves—natural abilities, culture, temperament, experience, mental or spiritual qualifications—for accomplishing the work we desire to do, in that measure our usefulness will be hindered. Down the long centuries Joseph is our teacher still: “*It is not in me; God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.*”

But when the Blessed Spirit accomplishes in the messenger of Christ this emptying of self, He is graciously willing to take possession of each humble soul. Thus, all may be equipped for the work of God. The filling of the Spirit is a blood-bought gift for each believer. Galatians iii. 13-14, has produced a crisis in the experience of many a Christian worker. To accept it as true for ourselves turns our weakness into strength, and feeble finiteness into omnipotence. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law . . . that we might receive the *promise of the Spirit by faith.*” As we stood on the blood-stained grass at Calvary, and received the first-fruit of Christ’s redeeming death, even the forgiveness of sin, so we must return to the same sacred spot and

take from the same tree the equally blessed purchase, the gift of the filling of the Spirit. As the writer passed over Westminster Bridge one evening, when the lamps on the Embankment had just been lit, the broad silver bosom of the river reflected the twinkling lights. There flashed into his soul the remembrance of Christ's invitation and promise, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me . . . out of him shall flow rivers of living water." The vision then given of the Divine streams of influence flowing from the soul, which would rest upon Christ for the blessing, in mighty Amazons, Mississippis, Seines, Rhines, and Elbes of power, has never faded from his remembrance. This blessed entire possession of the Spirit is, at times, a distinct initial experience. It was so with Christmas Evans, C. G. Finney, D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, and many others. But with many another one, used in the service of God, no such crisis in their lives is recorded. It was for them, and can be for us, the reward of quiet confidence in the Divine promises, which make no conditions. But faith *must receive the gift* if soul-winning is to be achieved.

This holy warfare cannot be engaged in successfully unless the hand of faith holds firmly the *Sword of the Spirit*. Destructive Bible criticism breaks the weapon, which alone God has chosen to conquer man's prejudice and pride. "A mutilated Bible is a broken sword." Dr. Griffith Thomas has wisely pointed out the undeniable fact that Modernism—understood as the extreme conclusions of High Critics, questioning the truthfulness of Scripture and of our Lord—has never received, what is ever the Divine seal to all revealed truth, the Spirit's work in the regenerating of the human heart. Rev. Lionel Fletcher, in his *The Effective Evangelist*, writes: "The preacher of the future must be a man of *conviction* and *passion*." There must be no doubt left in the mind concerning our possession of a divine communication, and of its priceless value.

Conviction of scriptural truth must go hand in hand with *extraordinary prayer*, if souls are to be won in public preaching of personal evangelism. The Master Himself is our example here. If He needed whole nights in prayer, that He might be equipped for His task, how much more must we need to pray! Soul-winners have always been men of prayer. George Whitefield records, in his diary, "days and weeks"—these are his words—"spent upon the ground pleading for souls." Brainerd perspired, in the midst of Indian snows, with the intensity of his travelling for souls. We may well stop in our study sadly to confess that failure in soul-winning, so generally mourned, is easily explained by the Church's modern activities being allowed to thrust out the time for prayer. It was Jehovah Himself who condescended to

say of old, "Concerning the work of My hands, *command ye Me.*"

The work of soul-winning will be coldly engaged in, unless a sense of heavy *responsibility* weighs upon us. "Am I my brother's keeper?" The question has been answered throughout the Divine Word. God requires each faithful servant of His to seek the lost. A powerful parable, in modern literature, upon the subject, is that of a girl, belonging to a Bible class, passing away. The minister met—a few hours afterwards—first the mother, secondly the teacher, and thirdly a Christian girl in the same class. To all he put the same question, "Was Annie ready?" and from all he received a remorseful acknowledgment that, though a personal appeal was intended, it was put off, and could not then be given.

This responsibility will be felt *the more the value of immortal souls is recognized*. That value can be learnt alone at Calvary. "Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame." What joy?—the joy of winning souls. One has said, "Count the purple drops upon the cheeks of Christ, as they flow from the crown of thorns, if you would learn what a soul is worth." The value of souls will teach us how to love men to Christ. There is no time to be lost. "The King's business requireth haste."

In this most blessed service, *submission to the Divine leading* is all-important. Sometimes the impression given by the Holy Spirit to the Christian worker seems unreasonable, instance the call of Philip recorded in Acts viii. He was directed to leave his successful work in Samaria to go down by the way to Gaza, "which is desert." But He who directed the preacher's steps knew the homeward road which the Ethiopian statesman—an earnest inquirer—must take, and Philip's success in leading him to the Saviour was, perhaps, of greater importance to the cause of God in the world than the salvation of the whole Samaritan township. An American pastor tells how, after he had settled by the fireside, at the close of a hard day's work, he was impressed to visit a certain hearer. He fought against the impression, but vainly. Yielding to what he concluded was the call of God, he found the man sitting up late, anxious about his soul, and longing for direction. Had the impression been altogether resisted, the will of God in the winning of this soul would not have been accomplished. He of whom Christ said, "He will guide you into all truth," will guide us also in the path of successful service. Unquestioning obedience to the Divine guidance is one of the secrets of soul-saving.

If we would win souls, great stress must be laid upon the *central truths of revelation, and especially upon the Atoning Cross*. "I, if I be lifted up," is still the magnet to draw the

hearts of men to God. Miss Frances Ridley Havergal once told her clergyman that she wished he would sometimes preach to his congregation "as if they were Zulus." Her meaning is clear. We too often take for granted that they are known, and so omit from our talks with souls the very truths and facts which are God's means of convicting of sin and leading to Christ. We need to tell the story of Calvary as though it were new to the ears of the listeners. Certainly, this was the apostolic method: "Before whose eyes," writes Paul to the Galatians, "Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you." The cross never loses its charm and power.

It may be that, both in private and in public, the people of God have shrunk, of late years, from making a direct *appeal* for decision, to the world. The increase of education, and the levelling of society have both, perhaps, been elements in promoting a reluctance to consider the hearer as a lost soul. But sin has not changed its character. Unbelief, as much as ever, receives the Divine sentence of condemnation. Men must be *doers* of the Word, as well as hearers. We must press home our message, "Repent, and believe the gospel." Without Christ is to be without hope concerning the future. There is the fulcrum upon which we must base the lever of our appeals. We have already referred to a useful book, *The Effective Evangelist*, by Rev. Lionel Fletcher. He recounts noteworthy instances of ministerial success when some method of evangelistic appeal has been introduced into the Sunday evening service by the regular pastor. The writer has found it wise to base the appeal upon the immediate acceptance of Christ. But there must be an appeal! "Flee from the wrath to come"; "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish"; "As though God did beseech you by us; we pray you . . . be ye reconciled to God."

There can be no great success in winning souls unless there is so large a faith in the sure promises and certain presence of the Holy Spirit, as may be translated—*expectancy*. "Christ has power to give, to the feeblest of His servants, the strength of Almighty God." The largest harvests in this field have always been reaped by those who were sure of the blessing of God upon their labours. The Apostle Paul illustrates this again and again in his epistles. Witness such sentences as these: "I am sure that when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ." "Now thanks be to God, . . . who maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place." Down the ages there has been the same bright, sure hope expressed by all successful soul-winners. The writer was in Pastor C. H. Spurgeon's vestry with the great soul-winner evangelist, D. L. Moody, before the commencement of the first service

of his mission in the Metropolitan Tabernacle. As the clock struck three the evangelist rose from his chair, and walking towards the door which led into the Tabernacle, he said, "There is going to be a mighty smash in this place." The Americanism was peculiar, but the faith was evident. There must be assurance of success if we are to fulfil faithfully our commission to "catch" men for our Lord.

There is a picture parable which seems to contain all the thought of soul-winning. A woman, evidently just rescued from the raging sea, is kneeling upon a rock, with her left arm round the cross which crowns it. Her right hand is holding on to another woman, still in the waves, whom she is seeking to rescue. This embodies all that we have been trying to say. There must be no selfish contentment with a mere personal salvation. A true love to Christ begets the passion for souls. The Moravian motto was, "To win for the Lamb that was slain, the reward of His sufferings." The perishing are around us everywhere. The time of rescue is short. The value of each soul is beyond price. "If I might by all means save some" was the motto burnt into the soul of the great apostle. God write it upon our hearts also! It was said of Duncan Matheson, who won so many for Jesus in the great revival of 1859, that eternity seemed to be imprinted on his eyeballs. The writer frequently heard Spurgeon, with tears in his eyes, give out the hymn :

My God! I feel the mournful scene;
 My feelings yearn o'er dying men;
 And fain my pity would reclaim,
 And snatch the firebrand from the flame.
 But feeble my compassion proves,
 And can but weep where most she loves;
 Thine own all-saving arm employ,
 And turn these drops of grief to joy.

"Let us work while it is called to-day, for the night cometh in which no man can work." It is said of the American home missionary, Vassor—called "Uncle John Vassor"—that he spoke of the matter of salvation to individuals as though it were the business of his life. God made it our aim, above all and beyond all our secular callings or educational pursuits. "He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal." "They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."

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