

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

SERMON

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"And He saith unto them, follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."—Matt. iv. 19.

The facts of history testify that frequently great events have arisen from apparently insignificant beginnings. From the inconsiderate listening of Eve to the fair words of the tempter came the moral desolation which has overwhelmed the human family. From the apparently incidental passing of a few merchantmen, on their way to Egypt, at the moment when the brethren were in perplexity what to do with Joseph, began the eventful history of God's wonderful dealings with the nation of Israel—a history which has fully shewn to an unbelieving world that the God of heaven rules over men on earth. When the well-laid plot was almost ready for execution by which it was hoped that the Jewish nation would be cut off, that night some unknown cause kept the king from sleeping, and, to while away the sleepless hours, he caused the chronicles of the kingdom to be read in his hearing, and, by one sentence in these chronicles, arose the defeat of the conspirator and the deliverance of the doomed nation.

It was to the world an insignificant event when it was told that a child was born in the stable at Bethlehem. What is there more important about that birth than in the birth of any other poor man's child? but the angels of heaven were not so blind to the connection of that event and the grand results which would arise from it to the human family. So great have been the results which have arisen from seemingly insignificant causes that no thoughtful observer of the history of events will think or speak lightly of apparently insignificant causes of anything which stretches forward into the unknown future.

History plainly shews that men have made great mistakes in judging by outward appearance. Results have shewn that man has been both ignorant and rash in despising the day of small things; in nothing has he made greater mistakes than in connection with the Gospel. It has been to the Jew a stumbling block, and to the Greek foolishness (while its results have demonstrated that it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek). The one has unbelievably asked: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" The other, in his pride of intellect and contempt for all who did not reach his style of diction, forgot the truth in the speaker, and asked in scorn, "What will this babbling say?"

In the face of such opposition Jesus began the conquest of the world by seemingly insignificant means; Himself unknown to the nation in which He was an obscure citizen; earning his bread by the sweat of his brow, until the day He was publicly declared by the forerunner to be the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world; and, though then distinguished unto John by the Spirit descending on Him, no outward mark of his personal greatness could be seen by the world. He sought not to surround himself with men of learning or social influence to give an impetus at the beginning of his great undertaking, but called unto Him a company of men destitute of any outward recommendation. They had no philosophic acuteness to enable them to contend successfully with traditionary Judaism. They had no eloquence which specially pointed them out as qualified to persuade men to yield to the claims of Jesus. They were not distinguished for their social influence, but poor fishermen of an outlying province. These seemed not to be the men fitted for the conquest of the world. Yet these were the instruments the Lord Jesus made choice of by calling them, as in the words before us, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

These words bring before us the work of the Gospel minister and the way to do that work. It is chiefly to the way of doing the work that I desire to call attention. The thought may be thus expressed: The way to win souls is to follow Christ. All of us, having anything like an adequate apprehension of the nature, the importance, and the difficulty of the work we often concerned about doing it rightly. It is possible that zeal to gain the end may lead us to adopt wrong methods which, for a time, seem to be crowned with success, but afterwards the results may lead us to feel that the

end does not justify the means. The way, as Jesus points out to us here, is to follow Him.

1. Certainly this includes

PERSONAL SUBMISSION.

This step seems absolutely necessary as the first requisite for the doing of the work rightly. There must be an apprehension of the condition of the sinner, of the character of Jesus Christ as the Saviour, of the nature of the work done by Christ for man, and a cordial reception of that Saviour and the work He has done, in order to the first step in following Christ. There must be a personal submission of the heart ere the soul can ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

The person who attempts to teach the truth, who knows it not himself, is as a blind man leading the blind. The person who presumes to draw another to Christ, who refuses to be drawn himself, is not following Christ. We know that such things have been tried and sometimes commended. There have been parents who have attempted to teach the truth of Christ to their children who did not know the truth themselves. There have been Sabbath school teachers attempting to teach the way of salvation who were not in that way themselves. There have been ministers who have attempted to teach men the way of life when they were not in that way themselves, who have after getting the light, confessed that they had not been following Christ. Renewal of the heart, personal conversion, lies at the foundation of all true following of Christ.

2. Following Him implies

KEEPING THE END OF OUR WORK IN VIEW.

The end is to fish men—to win souls. They are lost, they are perishing, and the Saviour has put into our possession the means of rescuing the perishing, and we are bound to use the instrumentality in the best way possible in order that men may be saved. *Within view* men are in peril, and we are called on to rescue them by a faithful use of the instrumentality committed to our trust. Is it possible for men, standing by the river, with suitable means of deliverance in their hands, while numbers of their fellows are borne down by the rapid current to death, yet so to occupy their attention with the means of rescue that they fail to employ it in saving one? Facts testify that this has been done by cowardly and heartless men. And facts testify that this has been done when souls have been in peril. Men have so handled the Word of God that, instead of using it with the view of rescuing the perishing, they have used it only to tell men (by enjoining moral duties) to take care lest they be lost, and have conveyed to the lost the thought that by due care on their own part they may escape the consequences of sin. Some who have been called to win souls have forgotten that men are lost. They have lost sight of the truth that the heart is at enmity with God, is not subject to the law of God, that all the world is guilty before God, that men are under condemnation and in need of an immediate deliverance. These things have been forgotten, while the messenger has occupied his attention with the composition of his sermons, with the cultivation of literature or science, or the many duties of his office, and, has allowed the chief end of his work to sink into a secondary place. To become oblivious to the fact that his chief work is to rescue the lost, to forget that his work is to testify unto his fellowmen that Christ is the Saviour of the world, is to forget to follow Christ. He never lost sight of the great end of his mission on earth, which was to seek and to save them that are lost. For this end was He born, for this cause came He into the world, that He might bear witness unto this truth. Wherever He was He spoke to perishing men of the bread of life, of the water of life, of giving Himself a ransom for many, of being lifted up as the serpent in the wilderness, so that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life. The end of his mission He kept in view when speaking to the learned in the courts of the temple, or to the multitudes on the slopes of the mountains in Galilee, or to the woman by the well of Jacob, or privately to his disciples. The one theme which occupied his thought was to do his Father's will, and his will is that none should perish, but that all come to repentance. This pervaded his thought and influenced his actions, and has left an example to those called to win souls.

3. Following Him includes

EXALTING HIM.

There was a weakness shewn by the disciples which

they had great difficulty to get over. Self-seeking continually intruded itself in following the Master. John and James sought the highest place of personal honour, they sought to give the Master counsel regarding the inhospitable Samaritans. Peter presumed to direct Jesus not to throw his life away, and even when the cross was drawing near they were disputing one with another who should be the greatest. In these things they were not exalting Christ to the first place in their thought, but rather of trusting themselves before Him; of such as do this Jesus says they are thieves and robbers. As his followers our place is not to stand on the same platform with Him. He is our Lord and great Captain and must have the place of honour in all we do in his name. Should any victory be gained through our instrumentality to Him the praise must be given, because it is He who has made us fishers of men. Behind Him we must desire ever to stand, so that men may see Him only, while our song is, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give praise for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Our ambition must be to have the place which a pious Christian assigned to the late Ebenezer Brown, when on a Monday morning he asked how his sermon was liked yesterday. The reply was, "I did not see you, sir, for your Master." Out of sight behind our Master is the proper place for the winner of souls. This thought may be emphasized by the anecdote of a gentleman furnished with the very best tackle, who toiled all day and caught nothing, while, near by, a ragged boy, with the most primitive apparatus, caught fish in abundance. He asked of the boy the secret, and was answered, "the fish will not catch, sir, so long as you do not keep yourself out of sight." O for such devotedness to the honour of Christ as to keep Him ever before us that even our hand shall not be seen by our hearers to draw their attention from Him to ourselves! O for such power to enable us so to present Him that we shall disarm the criticism of the hearer by shrinking out of sight in the shadow of our Master's greatness!

Does not the stammering tongue of the devoted soldier speak so admiringly of his general that the hearer forgets the speaker in the picture of the general? Can it not be aimed at? Can it not be attained by the soldiers of Christ? It is difficult to reach this attainment. The weak children of men have not yet attained, neither are already perfect, but the difficulty must be faced in the determination to exalt Him as He to whom we desire men to look. Renouncing the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. So preaching "that we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves the servants of men for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. iv. 2-7).

4. Following Him implies

HOWING TO HIS AUTHORITY.

His Word is ever to be our standard of appeal. Here his authority is to be regarded as supreme. As emphatically as to Jonah is his direction to every one He sends as a messenger, "Go and preach the preaching that I bid thee." It may be unpleasant to the modern messenger, as it was to him, and to those to whom the word is spoken. In the case of Jonah, as now, it is the word of the Master, and the very word that was blessed to the inhabitants of Nineveh. No modification of that word could have produced such a grand result. It is not our place to stand and argue with our great Master, as Lot did with the angels who had laid hold of his hand to lead him from destruction. Though we may be led toward a dark cloud, in which there are mysteries we cannot expound, it is ours to do as did Abraham when commanded to do a strange thing, which seemed to run in opposition to a precious promise which he firmly believed. Asking no questions he arose early, thoughtfully prepared, and set out to do as the Lord had bidden him. Surely he has spoken to us more plainly than to Abraham, and whatever obscurity may yet hang over any word He has spoken we will not hesitate to assert it if we are submissive to his authority. We may not take the place of apologists for anything He has said, nor express regret that He has so spoken, but contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Such submission may seem to clip the wings of imagination, and greatly circumscribe the field of speculation, and cramp the activity of intellectual gifts. It is not so, however. To follow Him as our authority