

Fickle Followers

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon warns that true discipleship requires sincere repentance, counting the cost, and putting Christ above all else, exposing the folly of superficial or half-hearted followers.

Scripture: Luke 9:57-62, John 6:37, Proverbs 3:5, Luke 14:26-27

Topics: "Discipleship", "Faith and Repentance", "Cost of Following Christ"

Description

In 'Fickle Followers,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the challenges of true discipleship by examining the responses of three would-be followers of Christ. He emphasizes the necessity of sincere repentance, wholehearted commitment, and the willingness to endure hardship for the sake of the Kingdom. Spurgeon encourages believers and preachers alike to discern genuine faith from superficial profession, reminding all that following Christ demands counting the cost and putting Him first above all else.

Transcript

"And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow You wherever You go. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. And He said unto another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go you and preach the Kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow You; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." Luke 9:57-62.

SOMETIMES nobody appeared to come to Christ. He preached, but no followers appeared as the result of His preaching. At another time, we see that many came and desired to be numbered with His disciples, but they were not all of the right kind. Luke has collected here three instances which I think are typical of many more of those who seemed to be true followers of Jesus, who, nevertheless, did not continue with Him and were not really converts. I think that these three are put together, here, for the comfort of those of us who preach the Gospel—that when we are disappointed, we may perceive that we are not worse off than our Master was—and that, when we think that we have brought men to conversion and find, after all, that they are not converted, we may not give up the work or be discouraged, but may say to ourselves, "It was always so. It was so with the Prince of Preachers. May we not reasonably expect that it will be so with us, also?"

Our Savior never refused anybody who came to Him and who ought to have been accepted by Him. His own words were, "Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out." That is a true description of His dealing with men at all times. If they do but come sincerely and truly, He always welcomes them. On the other hand, He did not shovel them in indiscriminately—He did not gather them to Himself wholesale. He did not go about, as it were, soliciting their patronage, willing to take in anybody so long as he could swell the number of His followers. Oh, no! We have good evidence here that He knew how to shut the door as well as to open it. He knew as well how to warn the pretentious as to accept the penitent. He was ready for the sincere with open heart and open hands—but He was faithful to those who were self-deceived, or those who, through ignorance, professed what was not really true. Now, we ought to be the same, dear Friends. We should always be anxious to receive all who will come to Christ. At the same time, we must exercise judgment and not put down everybody as converted simply because he says that he is, but we must judge, watch, try and test—lest we help self-deception—and come to be the servants of Satan by bolstering up the delusions of mistaken men and women!

One thing I do not like about these three people of whom I am going to speak to you tonight, and that is, that in the case of no one of them does there appear to be any sense of sin. There is nothing said about repentance, or about their feeling their deep need of a Savior. They are like many we know. With no tears in their eyes, strangers to a broken heart, they become religious mainly of themselves, and they become irreligious of themselves. What they gained themselves they lost themselves. But, where there is really a deep plowing work done, when the seed comes up, it lives. Where the foundation is dug deep, when the house is built, it stands. When there is stripping, there is afterwards real clothing. When there is a probing of the wound, the healing is a true healing and not a pretense. I regret, therefore, that there should be so many persons outside of my text who have not any repentance. They seem to jump into their religion as men do into their

morning bath, and then jump out again just as quickly, converted by the dozen, and unconverted, one by one, till the dozen has melted away—not really converted—otherwise they would never be unconverted again!

I believe that we are going to have a great many converts. We are praying over them and praying for them—and we need to know what sort of men and women they ought to be. We need to know how to deal wisely with them in the name of our loving, tender, but faithful Savior. We shall learn from His treatment of those who came to Him, how we should deal with those that come to us.

Now, first, there are some would-be followers of Christ who do not consider, as in the first case. Secondly, there are some would-be followers of Christ who do not put Christ first, as in the second case. And, thirdly, there are some would-be followers of Christ who still hanker after the world—and want to have Christ and the world, too. Neither of these three sets of followers will ever prove a comfort to us or a glory to God.

I. First, THERE ARE SOME WOULD-BE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST WHO DO NOT CONSIDER. The first man, and he was a scribe, too, said, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." What that might mean—what that might involve—he did not ask and, therefore, did not know. He was sincere as far as he knew—but then he did not know much. Had he known more, he would have said less.

Like our Lord, we meet with many persons who are great at resolving! "I will. That I will. Solemnly, I declare that I will." They are willing to make that declaration as publicly as you like—and stand up, or fall down—or do anything else to declare that they have resolved. I frequently hear persons exhorted to give

their hearts to Christ, which is a very proper exhortation. But that is not the Gospel! Salvation comes from something that Christ gives you, not something that you give to Christ! The giving of your heart to Christ follows after the receiving from Christ of eternal life by faith. It is easy to work our friends up so that they say, "We will give our hearts to Christ," but they may never do it, after all. If, with broken heart and contrite sigh, they had confessed their guilt and had penitently cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner," they might not have looked quite so well, but there would have been more hope for them. We cannot come to Christ unless Christ comes to us and gives us a broken heart and a contrite spirit! If there is no repentance, depend upon it that that faith which we think we have is not the faith that will save us! Give me Faith with tears in her eyes—I know her to be the true child of God. The faith that makes me feel my ruin, confess my sin and lay hold of eternal life because otherwise my merits will bring me to eternal death—this is the faith which saves! But some people are very great at resolving rather than repenting and believing.

These people show, generally, very great confidence in themselves. This man said, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." There is no prayer, "Lord, help me to follow You," "Hold You me up, and I shall be safe," "Leave me not, or I shall wander from You." No, it is just this—"I have made up my mind to this, and I am a strong-minded person, and able to carry out what I determine. Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." That is our duty, but that duty we shall never attain apart from Divine help. "He that trusts in his own heart is"—what? A convert? No, "a fool." And "a fool" is another name for a sinner. Go, write on water, and return tomorrow to read the phrase you have inscribed! And when you have done that, trust your own determinations! Go and say that you will pluck the moon out of her orbit, or stop the sun in his blaze at mid-day! And when you have done these things, then can you so control yourself as to be always faithful to your Lord without His help. I would have you deal far more in confession than in resolving. Much more in believing than in bearing testimony to anything you have done, yourself, or hope to do, yourself, or resolve to do, yourself! This first man is very big—he talks great swelling words and he feels that he can do what he says and, in the simplicity of his ignorant heart, he says—"Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

Do you not think that, perhaps, there was at the back of that declaration, some secret idea that he would be a gainer by it? May not this man have thought that Jesus Christ had come to set up a temporal kingdom and that, by following Him, he would get a high place in that new kingdom? If even Christ's at His left, I cannot wonder if this half-disciple had some idea that he was going to be a great deal better off as to carnal things for being a follower of Christ!

Now, it may be that some here imagine that the Christian life is all pleasure and joy, that there will be no persecution to endure, no affliction to bear. It may be that you have imagined that the way to Heaven is by a grass path, rolled, every inch of it, and that when you say, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go," you mean that you will follow Him through Jerusalem when everybody waves the palm branches and casts his garment in the way. Do you know anything about Gethsemane and the bloody sweat? About Gabbatha, and the cry, "Crucify Him!"? And about Golgotha, that

scene of deadly woe? Will you follow Him there when the many turn aside? Will you witness there that He, alone, has the Living Word? You think it shall be all king's weather with you if you go with Christ? Know you not that Christ leads us where the fiercest winds blow and where the stormy blast pitilessly hurls the sleet into our faces, and where we must perish if we live on earthly comforts? The people of God are a tried people—but many fancy that it cannot be so—and so they say, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

Now, notice that Christ undeceived this man in a very amazing way by telling him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head." He told that scribe that if he became His follower, he must share with Him, for the disciple is not above his Lord, nor the servant above his Master. What will you have to share if you follow Christ? You will have to follow a friendless Man without a home and often with no one to understand Him! If you take Him to be your Leader, you will have to travel over a rough road. Oh, may none of you ever profess Christianity for the sake of what you can get! I can assure you that, in these days, those who follow Christ for loaves and fishes will find the loaves very small and the fishes very full of bones!

The Savior meant this scribe to know, also, that, if he followed Him, not only would he gain no wealth by it, but he would get very little kindness as the result of it, for our Savior had no home of His own. There were kind friends, like those at Bethany, who often entertained Him, yet there were nights when the fox went to his lair, and the crow went to the woods, but the Savior had to tarry till His head was wet with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night, for no man gave Him shelter. Christ says to this scribe, "You will be treated like that. You will lose many of your friends and those who are of your own household will become your enemies. Those who now admire you will abhor you—and those who now call you a fine fellow and are pleased to entertain you—will shut the door in your face! That is what you have to expect." When this man heard that, his enthusiasm, I suppose, cooled down. He was like Mr. Pliable, when he tumbled into the Slough of Despond. He said the Celestial City might be a very fine place, but, if the way to it was so bad as that, anybody might have that city for himself—he should not go plodding through miry ways in order to get to it! Many a man, when he has found that there is a Cross as well as a crown, has foregone the crown because he could not bear the Cross.

Does anyone here say, "That was rather a hard method of our Lord, to tell this hopeful person that, and so discourage him"? Ah, dear Friend, it was a very safe and proper method. Our Lord wants not to gather to His army those who cannot be soldiers. If we cannot endure what lies before us, it is honestly better for us to turn back than to pretend to go forward. If we enlist a man who is not sincere at the first, we are doing him a serious injury. We are doing ourselves an injury—we are doing the whole cause of Christ a solemn injury before the eyes of men—for all they that go back, like dogs to their vomit, bring disgrace upon the good cause. All those who say that they are Christ's and then go and live ungodly lives, stain the name of Christ! They do more injury through having made a profession than they would have been capable of doing if they had never made that profession.

Now, as the Church hastily counts up her numbers and says, "So many were converted," the world has another register and counts up the apostates, the backsliders, the wanderers! And it is a serious blow struck at the Crown and the Glory of Christ when the world can say, "Such-and-such a man bore Christ's name, but he acted like a servant of the devil." Hence our Lord was wise, as the great heart-searching Savior, to let this man know the worst side of religion, so that, if he did take up with it, he might know what the cost of it would be. And so would I say to everyone here—we want you to come, we want you to join the army of Christ, we want you to be followers of the Redeemer—but not unless you will first count the cost! We beg you not to take the name of Christ upon you unless you are truly His in your very soul!

Do not dare to be added to the Church of God, unless heart, soul, and spirit—your whole nature goes with your profession—and you become truly and really a follower of Christ. The enthusiastic often comfort a preacher, but they as often delude him. Let him be on his guard and try well, with searching Truths of God and with the untiring preaching of the whole Gospel to those who come to him, lest the great heap on the threshing floor should suddenly prove to be nothing but chaff, when God's great fan comes to blow upon it!

We must keep the fan of the Gospel going, that the chaff may be divided from the wheat, for God would have us separate between the precious and the vile—and then shall we be as His mouth.

II. Now, secondly, THERE ARE SOME WOULD-BE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST WHO DO NOT PUT CHRIST

FIRST.

The second case mentioned in this chapter is different from the first—"And He said unto another, Follow Me." This man was not a volunteer. The first man was—and he broke down in his preliminary examination. This man was, so to speak, a pressed man, impressed by the command of Christ, "Follow Me," and he broke down, too. Every true volunteer into the army of Christ is a pressed man. The Grace of God has pressed him in, but everyone who is impressed into the army of Christ is also a volunteer, for he is made willing in the day of God's power, so that, in the Kingdom of Christ, the pressed man and the volunteer are the same.

Still, there is a difference in this case. This man had a distinct command from the Lord—"Follow Me." That is a very solemn thing, to have a command from the Lord coming to the heart—and then to rebel it! I would have you very cautious when you hear the Word of God preached, or when you read it. If, at any time, it comes to you with unusual power—if it seems to arrest you, to lay an iron hand upon your shoulder—if you feel it difficult to get away from it, I pray you, do not try to get away from it, for, if you do, you will add very greatly to your guilt. When Jesus, Himself, seems to say to you, "Follow Me," be not deaf to the Divine message! Close not your ears to the heavenly command! Have not some of you sat in these seats, sometimes, and felt that if you could but get home, if you could but be spared to get to your little chamber to bow your knees in prayer, you would be very different from what you had ever been, for a voice which seemed more than human was calling to you, and you could not but hear it? I beseech you, never trifle with such a message as that! O my Hearers, never trifle with the Truth of God at all, but especially with a Truth of God that has a voice which you are compelled to hear, for, if you do, it will go hard with you. This man was called by Christ, who said to him, "Follow Me."

The excuse which he made seemed very natural. "He said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." To bury his father might be a duty of nature, but to put that first—"Suffer me first"—indicated where his heart was. He was willing to be a Christian—that is to say, a Christian and something else—but the something else must be written in large capitals, and then, at the bottom, in very small type, "and a Christian." Do you not know a great many people of that sort? Philosophical and Christian, but the Christian is quite the secondary consideration. They are like the man whose child was asked, "Is your father a Christian?" and who replied, "He is a Christian, I think. But he has not worked much at it lately." There are many Christians of that sort nowadays. They work at their own business and they do a little, now and then, between whiles, in Christianity.

You are no Christian unless you put Christ first! He will not come into your heart to sit in the worst chair in the house! He will not come into your soul to be lodged in the attic! He must have the best room and the best seat in the room—He must be first—and not even father and mother may come before the Lord Jesus Christ! A young man says, "Yes, I must first become a journeyman or a master. I must first be married. I must see to the main chance." Oh, the world is your main chance, is it? Then you are no follower of Christ! If Christ is not first with you, Christ is nothing to you. You cannot have Him to play with—you must surrender your whole life to Him and make Him the first and last object of your life's

ambition, if you have Him at all.

But with regard to what this man said about burying his father, if there were some force in it to our ears, the Savior who knew everything saw that there was no force in it, for He said, "There are other people to bury your father; but I have called upon you to come and follow Me now. Nobody else can do that for you, but the burial of your father can be done by others whom I have never called, and who know nothing about the Divine Life. Let the dead bury their dead." You would be surprised if I were to read you the letters which I receive about different things which the writers say I ought to do and could do. Of course I ought to take a side in politics and appear at the next political meeting. Of course, I shall not, because there are plenty of dead people to bury dead politics—and they may go and do it! My business is to preach the Gospel. Someone then says, "You should take up social questions." There are plenty of dead people to handle social questions—let them handle them if they like the work—my business is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Then it is said, "You ought to provide amusements for the people." Ought I? There are plenty of fools to do that without my going into competition with them! My business is to preach the Gospel. When a man is once called by Christ he may say of a great many things, "Well, they are very proper. Very proper, indeed, for others to attend to. Dead people need burying and ought to be buried. It is a pity that there should be any difficulty about their being buried, but there

are enough dead people to bury them. There are not enough living ones to preach the Gospel—there are not enough to follow Christ." "Follow Me," said Christ, "I must be first, and as for these other things, there are other people who can properly attend to them. It is more in their line. The dead know where the graves are. The dead know all about funerals. Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead."

After all, if he had gone home to bury his father, it would have involved so much loss of time to him. As a follower of Christ, during that time he would not have been attending to his work. If he could have gone home to the funeral and preached Christ to the mourners, it would have been all in his day's work. But as he would not have done so and did not think of doing so, he was only going simply to pay his debt of courtesy. He was losing so much time that ought to be given to his Master. And here was the worst result of this request—it produced unsound discipleship. Oh, what a mass we have of very questionable discipleship towards Christ—where somebody or something is put before Christ!

If you judge the man's life as it really is, you will find there is something that has a higher place in it than love to Christ. Judge him by his conversation—is Christ first? There is a deeper emotion in his heart caused by politics, it may be, than by religion. I know some of our Brothers and Sisters—I have no doubt they are most respectable people—but if there is a meeting upon some political question, they are all excitement! They shout, "Hurrah!" They nearly rave and act as if they ought to have a strait waistcoat on! But go to the Prayer Meeting and you will find that there they are as dull as death! When there is anything to be done for Christ, you cannot stir them—they seem to have gone into a soporific condition.

May God save us from that state of heart and life! If Christ is not first, He ought to be, and if we do not make Him first, above all other things put together, we do not know Him at all. You are no Christian if you are not altogether a Christian. If every part of you is not consecrated to Christ, I fear that no part of you is consecrated to Him! At all events, this faulty discipleship will never produce much fruit, or bring much glory to God. With this second class of would-be disciples, our Master was troubled, and so are we.

III. Now, thirdly, THERE ARE SOME WOULD-BE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST WHO STILL HANKER AFTER

THE WORLD. "And another also said, Lord, I will follow You." He is another volunteer—"but let me first." Something must be done first by him, too. There would have been no hurt in what he said if he had not put in that word "first." "Let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." Well, now, the objection to this was that he did not intend to come right straight out from the world. He did not mean to come out then and there for Christ—but he must first go home and bid them farewell.

We know, first, that this was a very dangerous procedure, because the probability was that when he went home to bid them farewell, they would get to crying over him, so that it would take a month to say farewell. And then he would have to say farewell again and, perhaps, keep on saying it all the rest of his life! No man leaves sin little by little. No, there is nothing that will do as an escape from sin but total abstinence from it—to have done with it—and cut the connection altogether, by God's Grace, and that without taking a farewell of it. O young man, when you are thinking of leaving the world, be afraid of those farewells! They have been the ruin of hundreds of hopeful people. They have been almost persuaded, but they have gone to their old companions just to give them the last kiss and the last shake of the hand—and we have not seen anything more of them! It is a dangerous operation—this trying to part with the world by degrees—gently, in a courteous way, little by little. You will never do it! No man becomes a follower of Christ in that mode. No, like Paul on the way to Damascus, turn at once from being an enemy into a friend of Christ and cry directly, "Who are You, Lord?" and, "What will You have me to do?" Only this is true conversion.

Next, I do not know that this young man was wrong in his proposition to go home, but, he was going for the wrong purpose. You notice that his objective was to "bid farewell" to all his friends. Suppose he had said, "Master, I will follow You, and to prove how I will follow You, I will go home and fetch my wife. I will go home and bring my children. I will go home and talk to my brother. I will go home and, in Your name and by Your power, I will bring my cousin to You"? But, no—he says that he is going to bid them "good-bye"—so he is not going with the heroic motive of winning them to Christ, like Matthew, when he called his old companions together—and Christ sat at the table and preached the Gospel to them. That was a grand bidding "good-bye" to the world! But this young man is simply going to bid them all farewell. Beloved, if you go to your old companions, go and tell them what the Lord has done for you!

It was a manifestation of indecision. He would follow Christ, but, well, that home of his, all those dear faces at home. Our Lord would not have forbidden his seeing them again at another time, but now, first, he asks to go and see them first, as if they would not be there another week, or another month! He must go there first. So we find plenty of people who are thus undecided. They would like to go to Heaven by that broad road along which the multitude of men are going down to Hell. "Yes, write my name in the Church rolls, but I shall keep it on the books of the club where I go and do a little bit of gambling, also. At any rate, just for a time. I must keep to my old companions for a while. I will be a Christian one of these days, but just now I have, well, the fact is, I have an engagement—I promised, and I must keep my promise." Oh, there is no hope of men while they are like this, swinging between the two states! They must take the grand decisive step and say, "Now I have cut the cable that bound me to the world. I have done with these dangerous shores. I have put out to the broad deep sea of consecration to God, never to come back to these rocks again."

This man's request showed a need of appreciation of Christ. Do you not think so? Why, if Jesus said to any one of us who are in our right minds, "Follow Me," should we not think it our highest honor, our

greatest delight to be His followers? Yes, let Him lead us over the ground where we see His blood-stained footprints and we will glory in following Him wherever He goes! Oh, when we start back, and must have a little more sin, and a little more of the pleasures of worldly company, and a little more going out with others where we ought not to go, it shows that the root of the matter is not in us and we are not really brought to the Lord!

And, finally, it showed great unfitness for the holy work, for the Master said, "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." When the plowman starts with his plow, he keeps his eyes right in front, looking straight ahead. If his heart is not in his work, every now and then, when he ought to be driving one way, he looks the other, and so he makes his plow boggle and get out of the rut. On he goes a little way and then looks back. He plows another bit and again looks back. He is a fine plowman! He will never win the gold medal in a plowing contest, I am sure! He is not fit to follow the plow at all—he is not up to his work. The plowman who is always looking here and there and everywhere, instead of looking straight ahead, is a most faulty plowman.

Now, we need for Christ, tonight, and every day and every night, men and women who will say, "I am for Christ, for Him to live, for Him to labor, for Him to suffer, for Him, if need be, to die! Straight ahead, turning neither to the right hand for this, that I may gain, nor to the left hand for fear of what I may lose, but straight ahead, by that Divine Grace which has come into my soul and made me feel that Christ is all my salvation, and all my desire—straight ahead I plow towards the end of the field." God grant us to have many such converts! They only come by a simple faith in Christ, by having done with self, by having laid aside self-righteousness and sin, and coming straight away to Him who alone can make sinful men to be His true disciples.

If there is anything in this discourse that belongs to any of you, will you kindly take it home? If you do not like it, take it home all the more! And if you even get angry at the Truth of God that I have proclaimed and think that it is very personal, then hug it closely to you because it must be meant for you! That truth which pleases us is often stolen, but that Truth of God which grieves us is our own property! We had better keep it until it has grieved out of us the sin which makes us grieved at it! I do not ask you to put on any cap that does not fit you. But, if there is one that does fit, wear it, and go with it before the Throne of Grace and cry to God to set the wrong right.

May God bless these words of mine to the warning of many, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON LUKE937-62.

Our Lord had been on the mountain and had been transfigured. When He came down, the first person that He met was the devil, with whom He had to come in contact. Whenever you or I get up on the mountaintop and have a very happy and delightful experience, we may expect to be in a battle before long. Our joy is, however, a preparation for the conflict—it nerves our spirit and makes us strong to meet the great enemy of our souls.

Verses 37-40. And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met Him. And, behold, a man of the company cried out saying, Master, I beseech You, look upon my son: for he is my only child. And,

lo, a spirit takes him, and he suddenly cries out; and it tears him that he foams again, and bruising him hardly departs from him. And I besought Your disciples to cast him out; and they could not. There they

were, all baffled and defeated—and their enemies were looking at them with many a grin of contempt and scorn. Now comes the conquering Captain. He will turn the tide of battle when His troops are flying before the enemy! He comes and with a word He gathers them together again.

41. And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you? Bring your son here. If you have been praying for some dear one and the devil is not cast out, but the one for whom you have pleaded seems to be worse, rather than better—notwithstanding all your prayers and all your efforts—hear the Master, Himself, saying to you, tonight, as He said to the father of this child, "Bring your son here."

42. And as he was yet coming, the devil threw him down and convulsed him. This is Satan's usual way. Whenever he is about to be cast out of anyone, he grows angry. And if he cannot destroy, he will worry, just as a bad tenant will do injury to the house if he cannot any longer keep possession of it. "As he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and convulsed him." Perhaps I speak to some, tonight, who are coming to Christ and yet have worse fears than ever. They are more troubled than ever they were before. Well, you are like this poor child—"As he was yet coming, the devil threw him down, and convulsed him." It was, however, the devil's last throw.

42. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father. How well it is done! How perfectly it is done, how easily it is done, how quickly it is done when Christ comes on the scene! Let us pray distinctly, tonight, for those who have been our failures up to now. They will not be Christ's failures if in prayer and by faith we bring them to Him.

43. And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they were amazed, many of them did not believe! It is one thing to be astonished. It is another thing to be humbled and to be led to simple faith in Christ. Never be content with any emotion but that which leads you to believe in Jesus for yourself.

43, 44. But while they wondered, everyone, at all things which Jesus did, He said unto His disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men. Just after the Transfiguration. Just after He had cast out the devil, He tells His disciples that "the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men." The shadow of the Cross fell upon Christ long before the substance of the Cross was on His shoulder. He never forgot that the day would come when He must lay down His life as a ransom for many. And He never started back from it, either—

"This was compassion like a God,

That when the Savior knew

The price of pardon was His blood,

His pity ne'er withdrew."

45. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask Him of that saying. They were not as yet spiritual enough to spy out His meaning. And when they had even a faint glimmering of it, it made them feel so sad, so cast down, that they did not dare to go and ask Him to explain it fully. Do you not think that you and I may have, tonight, something pressing upon us that would all vanish if we but took it to Jesus? And yet we fear to ask Him! Let us drive away that fear and be familiar with our Lord, and tell Him everything that vexes our spirit.

46. Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. Sad, sad, sad, a hundred times sad! When He was talking of His death and of His being delivered into the hands of wicked men, His disciples were disputing as to who should be the greatest! Ah, Brothers and Sisters, we may be guilty of quite as great an inconsistency! If, after Christ's death for us on the Cross, and after He has given up everything for us, and has washed us in His heart's blood— if we begin to want to be great and famous in the eyes of men, what wretches we are! May God deliver us from all ambition, from every kind of self-seeking and from any measure of pride! Otherwise, we are inconsistent in pretending to follow such a Master as the Lord Jesus.

47. 48. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by Him, and said unto them, Whoever shall receive this child in My name receives Me: and whoever shall receive Me, receives Him that sent Me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great. The way to rise in the ranks of Christ is to go down. Be willing to do the meanest thing and you are growing in Christ's esteem. When you are great, you are little. When you are nothing, then are you great. The Lord take away from us the black drops of pride that make us stand up on our dignity and think we must be

somebody! Somebody? God will not use you as long as you are somebody! But when you are nobody, then will God greatly magnify you and use you in His Church.

49. And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in Your name; and we forbade him, because he follows not with us. This man who was casting out demons was a Dissenter—he was not with the regular Church. He was doing good, but still, what right had he to do it? John said, "He follows not with us." He was outside the pale! And even John, with all his loving disposition, felt that he must blow that candle out! He had no right to shine in anything but the regular, orthodox candlestick. "We forbade him, because he follows not with us."

50. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us. Jesus also said that no man could do a miracle in His name and then lightly go and speak evil of Him, so that it was for the good of the cause to let the irregular practitioner go on with his business. Besides, if anybody can cast a devil out, by all means let him do it, for there is none too much of the power of casting out devils! And, remember, that these gentlemen who found fault could not cast the devil out themselves. They had been beaten in this very task and yet, when somebody else did it in the power of God, they began to complain and forbid them! That is surely being like the dog in the manger. God save us from falling into that spirit!

51. And it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up. Is not that a wonderful expression? Christ is to die and to be buried. Ah, but this word comprehends everything, "that He should be received up." Think not of the gloom of death, especially concerning your dear friends who have lately fallen asleep. Think of their being received up! They did seem to go down—they went as low as the grave but they could not go any lower! Thank God for His abounding mercy in receiving them up.

51. He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. To go where He must He scourged, spit upon and crucified—"He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

52, 53. And sent messengers before His face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for Him. And they did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. He used to be welcomed in Samaria, but now the evil spirit has come to the front again—"They did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem," and they wished nobody to go up to the feast at Jerusalem, but desired all to stop and worship God with them on Mount Gerizim.

So they would not receive Him.

54, 55. And when His disciples, James and John, saw this, they said, Lord, will you that we command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did? But He turned and rebuked them, and said, You know not what manner of spirit you are of. When you read the Old Testament, you will remember that the spirit of the Old Testament was in accordance with the Law of Moses. But you are not under the Law but under Grace, and the Spirit of Christ is another spirit, not the spirit of judgment, bringing down fire from Heaven, but the Spirit of mercy, bringing life and blessing from above!

56. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village. That was all Christ did by way of punishment of these Samaritans—He "went to another village." Yet, gentle as was this treatment, it was really a very severe punishment—such a punishment as will fall on all of you who reject Christ. If you will not receive Him, He will go to somebody else! If you will not hear Him, somebody else will. And if, when you hear Him, you will not accept Him, it may be that you will not hear Him many more times—the Word of God may never again be spoken with any power to you—Christ will go to somebody else.

57-62. And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow You wherever You go. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. And He said unto another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go you and preach the Kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow You; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.

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