

The First Five Disciples

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that God's work of grace is marked by divine variety, as seen in the distinct conversions of the first five disciples, illustrating that while the gospel message is constant, the methods of bringing souls to Christ are wonderfully diverse.

Scripture: John 1:37-51, John 1:29, Exodus 12, Numbers 15:27-31, Isaiah 53, Psalm 23

Topics: "Conversion", "Divine Providence", "Gospel Preaching"

Description

In this sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the conversions of the first five disciples of Jesus, illustrating how God employs diverse methods to bring souls to Himself. He highlights the necessity of faithful gospel preaching centered on Christ as the Lamb of God and encourages ministers to persevere in their calling. Spurgeon's rich exposition reveals the beauty of divine variety in grace and the personal love of Christ toward seekers.

Transcript

"And the two disciples heard him speak and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned and saw them following and said unto them, What do you seek? They said unto Him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where do You dwell? He said unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt and abode with Him that day for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak and followed Him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother, Simon, and said unto him, We have found the Messiah, (which is, being interpreted, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, He said, You are Simon the son of Jona: you shall be called Cephas, (which is by interpretation, A Stone). The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee and find Philip and say unto him, Follow Me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said unto him, We have found Him, of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip said unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him and said of him, Behold an Israelite, indeed, in whom is no guile. Nathanael said unto Him, Why do You know me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. Nathanael answered and said unto Him, Rabbi, You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these, And He said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter you shall see Heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." John 1:37-51.

IF it is true that "Order is Heaven's first law," I think it must be equally true that variety is the second law of Heaven. The line of beauty is not a straight line but always the curve. The way of God's procedure is not uniform but diversified. You see this with a glance, when you look at the creation around us. God has not made all creatures of one species but He has created beasts, birds, fishes, insects, reptiles. All flesh truly is not the same flesh, neither are all bodies of the same order. The dull dead earth, itself, is full of variety. Gems sparkle not all with the same ray. The grosser and less precious rocks are marked and veined. Each one according to its own fashion. In the vegetable world what a variety of plants, shrubs, herbs, flowers and trees we have about us! In any one of the kingdoms of Nature, whether it is the animal, vegetable, or mineral, you shall find so many subdivisions that it would need a long schooling to classify them and a lifetime would not suffice to understand them all.

Consider the winged creatures which flit through the air—what a diversity there is between the tiny humming bird, which seems to be but a living mass of gems, and the eagle which, with soaring wings ascends to the sky and sports with the lighting! The whole world is full of marvels and no two marvels alike. You shall never be able to find God repeating Himself. This great Master may often paint two pictures which seem alike, but investigated with the microscope, what differences at once are revealed!

Even those stars which seem to shine with rays of the same brilliance are discovered by the aid of the telescope to be of different colors, forms and orbits. No, even the very clouds are piled in varied forms and the masses of nebulae which make up the Milky Way are distinguishable from each other. God, in no instance that we can ever find, has used the same mold a second time. He is so affluent of designs, so abundant in the wisdom that devises, so prolific in plans that even when He would accomplish the same end He chooses to take another road to it. And that new road is quite as direct as those by which He has formerly reached His purpose.

Certainly this observation holds good in Providence. What strange diversity there has been in the dealings of God with His Church! When He has chastened His people He has scarcely ever made use of the same rod twice. At one time Midianites shall come up and devour the land of Israel. Another day the Philistines with their giants shall invade the country. Then shall come the Babylonians and the Assyrians. Later the Roman power shall tread Judea under foot. And as the rods of His chastisement have been always different on the great scale, so you have found it on the little scale.

God has seldom chastened you twice in the same way. You could trace diversities either in the manner of the blow or the instrument you were struck with, or in the part of your mind which seemed to be the most affected by His chastisements. In deliverers, again, how great a variety—you scarce find two alike! God raises up a Gideon, but Jephthah is not like Gideon and Samson is not like Jephthah, nor is David to be compared to Samson or Gideon. They are all diverse. And their weapons are varied, too. One man has to use an ass' jawbone, another must use a sling and a stone—one shall be content with the ox goad, while another must draw the dagger.

Different methods God ordains as well as different forms of man. And He delivers His people just according to His own will, but ever in a different form. Well may Providence be so diverse when you consider that men themselves whom God uses to be His principal instruments are so unlike each other. There are not merely the great differences of race and of nationality, nor even the differences of birth and education, but we are all different in constitution—no two minds being alike. There is an individuality about every one of us which will prevent our ever being mistaken for anyone else.

We might by accident be undistinguished, but let us be known and very soon important differences will be discovered. God is ever the God of variety and He will be so to the end of the chapter. He will do new things before He rolls up the book of history—we shall see new acts of the Lord—He will fight His battles after fresh methods, raise up deliverers different from any who have come before and will exalt and glorify His name upon new instruments of music. Let us expect it. He is the God of variety, both in Nature and in Providence.

My text is a very clear illustration that the same law applies in the work of Grace. There is ever the same kind of operation and yet ever a difference in the manner of operation. There is always the same Worker in the conversion of the soul and yet different methods for breaking the heart and binding it up again are continually employed. Every sinner must be quickened by the same life, made obedient to the same Gospel, washed in the same blood, clothed in the same righteousness, filled with the same Divine energy and eventually taken up to the same Heaven. And yet in the conversion of no two sinners will you find matters precisely the same.

From the first dawn of the Divine life to the day when it is consummated in the noontide of perfect sanctification in Heaven, you shall find that God works this way in that one, and that way in the other, and by another method in the third—for God still will be the God of variety. Let His order stand fast as it may, still will He ever be manifesting the variety, the many-sidedness of His thoughts and mind. If, then, you look at this narrative—somewhat long, but I think very full of instruction—you may notice four different methods of conversion. And these occur in the conversion of the first five who formed the nucleus of the college of Apostles—the first five who came to Christ and were numbered among His disciples!

It is very remarkable that there should be among five individuals four different ways of conversion! Were you, however, to examine any five persons, I suppose you would find similar disparity. Pick out five Christians indiscriminately and begin to question them how they were brought to know the Lord. You will find methods other than those you have here. And probably quite as many as four out of the five would be distinct from the rest.

I. The first case we have in the text is THE CONVERSION OF THE TWO DISCIPLES. One was probably John. We cannot speak with absolute certainty, but it was very probably John. We know it to have been the habit of this Evangelist to omit his own name whenever he could. Sometimes he speaks of "that other disciple," when he means himself. And now and then he puts it, "that disciple whom Jesus loved."

His love nurtured in him a kindly esteem of others, but an humble estimate of himself. While, therefore, he never omits to record the need of praise others obtained from the lips of Christ, as often as he can he omits his own name. It is supposed then—and I think rightly—that one was John. The other was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. The first two disciples are the fruits of preaching.

May we not expect to find that the major part of our conversions are the result of the public ministry? "The two disciples heard him speak and they followed Jesus." Let us offer a few words concerning this first matter. We expect, Beloved, to see a great number of souls brought to God by the preaching of the Truth of God. The preaching of the Cross may be and it actually is to those who perish, foolishness. But unto us who are saved, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Wherever there is the most Gospel preaching, you will find the most conversions.

Many of our societies for carrying the Gospel to the heathen forget their main work. And while setting up colleges, translating Bibles and publishing tracts, they neglect to use this great hammer of God, this

mighty battering ram which is to dash down strongholds. The preaching of the Cross, the crying of, "Behold the Lamb of God!"—this is God's appointed agency. Other labors are to be entered into, but this is the main and chief agency for the conversion of souls.

Observe in the case before us, the preacher. He was a man Divinely illuminated. Jesus Christ came to John's Baptism, but at first the Baptist did not know Him. After awhile, however, when the descending Spirit marked out the Messiah, John then knew to a certainty that this was He of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write. Ever afterwards John's testimony was clear and bold. Though he ended his ministry with the loss of his head, he never lost the honesty of his purpose or the lucidness of his testimony. He continued faithfully to declare that the Messiah had come.

Brethren, it is of importance in the work of the ministry that the preacher be a God-illuminated man. Not that education is to be despised—on the contrary, we cannot expect the Spirit of God in these days to give to men the knowledge of languages if they can acquire that knowledge by a little perseverance. It is never the Divine rule to work a superfluous miracle. With the faculties and powers we possess, we must yield up our members unto God as instruments of righteousness. So far, then, as the education of the man is concerned, we believe God leaves that with us, for if we can do it there is no need that any miracle should be worked.

But let the man be educated ever so well, he is then but as the lump of clay—God must breathe into his nostrils the breath of spiritual life as a preacher, or else he will be of no service—just a dead weight upon the Church of God. What shall we say, then, of those men who enter into a pulpit because the family living is vacant, or because, indeed, being too great fools for either the army or the law, they must needs be put where their livelihood can be more easily obtained—in the Church? How crying is this sin in our times, that men should have Episcopal hands laid upon them, declaring that they are moved to the ministry by the Holy Spirit, when they know not whether there is a Holy Spirit, so far as any experimental knowledge of His power upon their own hearts is concerned!

The day, I hope, is passing away when men shall be more skilled at hunting the fox than at fishing for souls. And on the whole, God is raising up in this land a spirit of decision upon this point—that the Christian minister must be a man who knows experimentally in his own soul the Truths of God which he professes to preach. God may convert souls, it is true, by a bad preacher. Why, if the devil preached, I should not wonder at souls being converted—if only the devil preached the Truth. It is the Truth and not the preacher. Ravens, unclean birds though they are, brought Elijah his bread and his meat—and unclean ministers may sometimes bring God's servants their spiritual food. But for all that, unto the wicked, God says, "What have you to do to declare My statutes?" The minister must be a God-taught man whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit. This, at least, is the standing rule—whatever exceptions may be pleaded.

Then, mark you, granted that this is the case we must not expect his ministry to be alike successful at all times, for in the present instance, on one occasion the Baptist gave a very clear testimony for Christ, but none of his disciples left him to follow Jesus. The next time he preached he was successful, for two of his disciples joined the Master, though on the former occasion we read not that one of his hearers was led to declare himself on the Lord's side.

My Brethren, God suffers His ministers to cast the net sometimes on the wrong side of the ship. Even a whole night they may toil and take nothing. They may sow upon the barren ground, upon the highway and

among the thorns. They may cast their bread upon the waters, and as yet they may not find it, for the promise speaks of "many days." Still the minister must persevere. If souls are not saved today, they may be tomorrow. I was wondering, as I read this passage, whether there were some who heard last Sunday in vain, who perhaps would hear to profit today. I was lifting up my heart in prayer to God that these words, "the next day after," might come true to some here.

Whereas, the other day, I cried, "Behold the Lamb!" and you did not see Him or trust Him, I will repeat the cry, "Behold the Lamb!" again today. O that you may be led to follow Jesus! When you have well considered the preacher and his success, I would have you observe his Subject. How short the sermon!—a rebuke to our prolixity. How plain it was— no difficult phrases—no high-flown elocutionary embellishments—no feats of oratory here! It is just, "Behold the Lamb!" But observe the Subject—John preaches of Jesus Christ, of nothing else but Christ. And of Christ, too, in that position and in that form in which He was most needed but least palatable.

The Jews accepted Christ the Lion. They looked for the mighty Hero of the Tribe of Judah who should break their bonds. Such Jesus was. But John did not preach Him as such. He preached Him as Christ the Lamb—the Lamb of God, the suffering, despised, meek, and patient Sacrifice. The Baptist held Him up to the sons of men on this occasion as the great Sin Bearer. He seems to have brought out most prominently in his own thoughts and before the minds of the people the picture of the paschal lamb and of the scapegoat. He dwelt upon this, that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

If there are to be many conversions worked in any place, the preacher must be a man taught of God and he must persevere, even though he has been unsuccessful. But he must see to it that this is the staple of all his sermons, the raw material out of which he makes every discourse—"Jesus and Jesus the Lamb! Jesus the Sin Bearer." He must ever be crying, "You Sinners, see your sins laid on Him! You guilty, look to Him! Trust Him! There is life in a look at Him. He has taken your sins and carried your sorrows—look to Him!" Let the preacher stammer here and he is undone. Let him be unsound on the Atonement. Let him speak in feeble strains, as though he apologized for so old-fashioned a doctrine and you shall hear of no conversions from January to December.

But let him hold this to be the first and most important Truth—that Jesus Christ came into the world to be a Sin Bearer for sinners, even the chief, and there must be conversions! God were not true to His promise, the Truth were no longer the potent thing it has proved itself to be in the olden times if souls were not quickened and turned to God by such a ministry as this! O you who preach the Gospel, keep close to this, "Behold the Lamb of God!" You young men who stand up in the streets, make this your topic! And you who minister to the Church of God, give them all the doctrines of the Gospel, but still always come back to this as the needle comes to its pole—"Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world!"

In these two conversions by public ministry it is interesting to observe the process. Carefully notice the narrative. A spirit of enquiry was stirred up in Andrew and his companion and they began to follow Christ, not exactly as disciples as yet, but as searchers. If I may say so, they followed Christ's back. They had not come to see His face yet, or to sit at His feet. They followed His back as some do who, being impressed under the Word, have a desire after Christ and intend to set about an honest investigation of His claims to their faith. While they are following behind Christ, He turns round and faces them.

Oh, what a blessed turning for them! It was a blessed turning for Peter when the Lord turned and looked upon him! And in this case while they are, as it were, following His back, He turns and He looks upon

them. I cannot tell you how much love there was in His eyes. The love of a mother to her first child may perhaps picture the love of Jesus Christ to these, His first disciples. He was God, He was Man, He was God's own Son. But He had never been a Master of disciples till that moment. Now He springs to a rank which He had not obtained before. Now He has some who will call Him "Rabbi," and will be willing to be guided by His teaching. He looks round upon them. Even so, when enquiry is excited by the ministry, and men begin to search, Jesus Christ looks upon them. With an eye of earnest affection He regards them and assists them in their search.

Jesus put to them the question, "What do you seek?"—a very modest question. Notice it. It is the first word of Christ's ministry. It is the first word I find Christ speaking at all in public—"What do you seek?" And was not it a very comprehensive question? "What is that you seek?" If there are any honest enquirers here after salvation, He puts the same question to you this morning—"What do you seek?" Are you seeking pardon? You shall find it in Me. Are you seeking peace? I will give you rest. Are you seeking purity? I will take away your sin. A new heart will I give you and a right spirit will I put within you. What are you seeking? Some solid resting place for your soul upon earth and a glorious hope for yourself in Heaven? Whatever you seek, it is here.

What a text this might be for a missionary when first consulted by some of the awakened heathen, when he should say, "You are on the search after Truth. Now what is it you really want? What do you seek? What is it? Because whatever it is that the human heart in its right state can possibly seek after—all that is to be found in Christ." Christ meets the man who is in an enquiring frame of mind by suggesting to him further enquiry. He stirs up the heart. While the soul's fire is burning He puts fuel to the flame.

They say, "Master, where do you dwell?" And His answer to them is, "Come and see." This is just how the process of conversion is worked in men's hearts. They want to know more of Christ and He says to them, "Come and see." You would have peace—come and see whether I can give it to you. I tell you that if you trust Me, your peace shall be like a river and your righteousness like the waves of the sea. "Come and see." You say you want purity—just try now the effect of the obedience of faith. See if it does not change your heart and renew your spirit. "Come and see." O you who are seeking and asking questions about Christ and about His Gospel and His Person and His pedigree, "Come and see."

The best way to be convinced of the potency of our holy Gospel is to try it for yourselves. If you are honest seekers, if the Grace of God has made you so, then come and test and try! "Blessed is every man that trusts in Him." This is our witness and our testimony. But if you want to be sure of it for yourselves, "Come and see." They took Christ at His word. They came and they saw. We are not told what they saw, but we are told what was the result—they stopped with Him that night and they remained with Him all His days and became His faithful disciples.

my dear Friend, if you would but come and see Christ! If by humble earnest prayer you would give your heart up to Him and then trust in Him implicitly to be your Guide, you would never lament the decision! If Jesus proves a liar to you, then desert Him! If His promises are not true, then stand no longer numbered with His disciples. But give Him a trial—

"O make but trial of His love! Experience will decide how blest are they and only they, Who in His Truth confide."

You see, then, the way in which God's Grace works through the Word—it excites a spirit of enquiry, then a still further enquiry, then the test of experience—and afterwards leads to the giving up of the heart to

Christ.

II. The next case is a very different one. The third of Christ's disciples, one Simon Peter, was brought in by PRIVATE INSTRUMENTALITY and not by the public preaching of the Word. Observe the forty-first verse, "Andrew first finds his own brother Simon, and says unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ." This case is but the pattern of all cases where spiritual life is vigorous. As soon as ever a man is found by Christ, he begins to find others.

The word "first" implies that he did not give it up afterwards—he first found his own brother Simon! How many he found afterwards I cannot tell, but I will be bound to say that Andrew continued to be a fisher of men till he was taken up to the third Heaven. He found very many after he had found Peter. The first instinct of the new-born life is to desire the good of others. I will not believe that you have tasted of the honey of the Gospel if you can eat it all yourself. True Grace puts an end to all spiritual monopoly.

I know there are some who think there is no Grace beyond their own Chapel. They believe that God never works beyond the walls of their own tabernacle. Beyond the range of the voice of their minister everything is unsound, unorthodox, pretensions perhaps, but still fatally delusive. They hold that all others are out of the bond of the Covenant and, not unlike those ancient wranglers in the land of Uz, they say, "We are the men and wisdom will die with us." Surely God's people never talk in that fashion, or if they do, they are then speaking the language of Ashdod and not the speech of the child of Israel, for the Israelite's tongue drops with love and his speech is full of the anxious desire that others may be brought in!

Look at our Apostle Paul. You shall never find stronger predestinarianism than you read in the ninth chapter of Romans, and yet what does he say? His heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. He had heaviness of heart, he says, for his Brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. There was no man more anxious to convert souls than Paul, though there was no man more sound in the doctrine of the election of God. He knew it was not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but yet he could say as Samuel did, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

See, then, that the first desire of a Christian man is to endeavor to bring others to the Savior. Relationship has a very stern demand upon our first individual efforts. Andrew, you did well to begin with Simon. I do not know, my Brethren, whether there are not some Christians giving away tracts at other people's houses who would do well to give away a tract at their own. I wonder whether there are not some going out to the villages preaching who had better remain at home teaching their own children—or whether even in the Sunday school there may not be those who come before God to perform one duty, while their hands are stained blood-red with the murder of another duty. Your first business is at home. You may have a call to teach other people's children—that may be—but certainly you have an imperative call to teach your own. You may or you may not be called to look after the people of a neighboring town or village, but certainly you are called to see after your own servants, your own kinsfolk and acquaintances. Let your religion begin at home.

We have heard of some people who export their best commodities—many traders do—I do not think the Christian should imitate them in that. At least let the Christian have all his conversation everywhere of the best savor, but let him have a care to put forth the sweetest fruit of spiritual life and testimony at home and in the circle of his own kinsfolk and acquaintances. Andrew, you did well, first, to find your brother Simon. When he went to find him he may not have thought of what Simon would become. Why, Simon was worth ten Andrews, as far as we can gather from the Evangelists! Peter was a very prince among the Apostles!

And with that ready tongue of his and that bold, dashing, daring spirit—with that confident, resolute soul—there were none of them a match for Peter!

John might excel in love, but still Peter was verily a leader among the Apostles, and Andrew would but little compare with him. You may be yourself but very deficient in talent and yet you may be the means of bringing a great man to Christ. Ah, dear Friend, you little know the possibilities which are in you! You may but speak a word to a child and in that child there may be slumbering now a great heart which shall stir the Christian Church in years to come. Andrew has only two talents, but then finds Peter. Andrew's testimony to Peter is worthy of remark. There was great modesty in it and that, I dare say, commended it to Peter.

He did not say, "I have found the Messiah"—he says, "We." Whoever was the other disciple, he gives him his share of the discovery. Our speech never loses force by losing pride but generally increases its power in proportion to its modesty, though that modesty must never interfere with boldness. His testimony was very plain and very positive. He did not beat around the bush or hesitate, but it is just this—"We have found the Messiah." Plain and unadorned was the statement, very positive. He did not say, "I think we have," or, "I trust we have," but, "we have." And this was just the thing for Simon Peter.

Peter wanted positive and plain dealing and he was a man who wanted it pushed home by a brother's friendly voice, or else it had little availed him to speak of Christ at all. When he was brought to Jesus, observe the process of conversion. Jesus describes to him his present state. He said, "You are Simon, son of Jona." Some interpret this, "You are Simon, the son of the timid dove." He explains to him what he was—shows that He knew him—that He understood both his boldness and his cowardice—both his rashness and his constancy. And then, when He had told him what he was, Jesus gave him a new name indicative of the nature which His Grace would give—"You shall be called Cephas, a stone."

Now this is the general plan of conversion. It is the plan in every case, really, though not apparently. Nature is discovered and Grace is imparted. The old name we are taught to read with sorrow and a new name is given to us and we rejoice in it. There may be some here who have not been converted to God under the ministry but under the words of a Sunday school teacher, or a sister, or a friend. Thank God and take courage. It does not matter how you are converted, so long as you are resting upon Jesus only!

If you have not been a searcher of the Word, if Christ has never seemed to say to you, "Come and see," yet if your nature has been changed and you have received a new name—if there is a radical change in the rest—you are a child of God. That you are brought into the fellowship of the saints is an illustration of the unity of God's purpose. That there should be distinctive marks in your conversion is quite in harmony with the diversity of His operations.

III. "The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee and find Philip and say unto him, Follow Me." The fourth disciple is called without either the public Word or private instruction—he is called directly BY THE VOICE OF JESUS. Now in truth all men are so called, for the voice of John or the voice of Andrew is really the voice of Jesus Christ speaking through their instrumentality. But in some cases no apparent instrumentality is used. We have known some who on a sudden have felt impressions, from where they came or where they tended they did not know.

In the midst of business we have known the workman suddenly check his plane—a great thought has entered into his brain—where it came from he could not tell. We have known a man wake up at midnight—he could not tell why, but a holy calm was upon him and as the moon was shining through the window there seemed to be a holy light shining into his soul and he began to think. We have known such

things to occur—surprising cases—when men have been planning deeds of vice.

Was it not so with Colonel Gardner—that very night about to perpetrate a crime and yet stopped by Sovereign Grace upon the very brink of it, without any apparent instrumentality? We can not tell, Brethren, when God may regenerate His elect, for though we are to use means and cry to God to send forth laborers into the vineyard, yet the Sovereign Lord of All will frequently work without them. The Word which has been heard in years gone by. The Scripture which was known in childhood may, by the direct power of the Holy Spirit, without any immediate apparent means, turn the man from darkness to Light. Jesus Christ spoke but two words, but those words were enough—"Follow Me"—and Philip at once obeyed. What preparation of heart there had been before, I cannot tell. What still small voice had been speaking before this in Philip's ear, we do not know. Certainly the only outward means was this voice of Christ, "Follow Me."

And there may be in this House some who will be converted this morning. You do not know why you are here. You cannot tell why you strayed in. But yet it may be—God knows—Christ would have you come here because He would come here Himself. Is not there something which invites a pause in that word, "would," as we read it in this verse?—"The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee." Is not there something of the Divine necessity which we have often noticed in another place?—"He must needs go through Samaria." Did not He feel instinctively that there was a soul there which He must meet with and He must go after it and speak the all-commanding, sin-subduing Word?

Perhaps this morning Jesus would come to the Tabernacle! Jesus would come here because He knows that Philip is come here, too. Philip, where are you? You may have lived in sin and despised Christ, but if He says, "Follow Me," I beseech you obey His word and follow Him! To follow Christ is the picture of Christian discipleship in every form. Follow Christ in your doctrines—believe what He teaches! Follow Christ in your faith—trust Him implicitly with your soul! Follow Him in your actions—let Him be your example and Guide! Follow Him in ordinances—in Baptism follow Him and at His Table follow Him!

To every deed of daring, to every place of spiritual communion, to the mountain of secret prayer, or to the crowd in open ministry, follow Him! According to your measure tread in the footsteps of your Lord and Master. And this, I say, may be directed to one who has had no other instrumentality used upon him, but just the mysterious voice of Christ—"Follow Me." It was so with the third case. Perhaps of the three this experience is the highest. The first two were told, "Come and see," and they came to understand the value of Christ. But this one is made to follow—he carries out practically that which the others did but see.

The second conversion before us attains a higher degree than the first. But this is the highest of all when the change of nature, as in the case of Peter, now leads to a change of action, as in the case of Philip, who arises and follows Christ.

IV. I hope I have not wearied you, for there is yet the fourth case of the fifth disciple, which differs from them all—Nathanael. What shall we say of Nathanael? Was he converted by ministry? It does not appear so. Was he converted by PRIVATE INSTRUMENTALITY? He was partly so. Philip finds Nathanael, but Philip's finding of Nathanael was not quite so effectual as Christ's finding of Philip. When Christ found Philip, Philip believed. But when Philip found Nathanael, Nathanael would not believe. He said, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Philip is partly the instrument, but there is something more. Jesus Christ Himself shows His own power BY TELLING TO

NATHANAEL THE SECRETS OF HIS HEART. But still, Nathanael's conversion to Christ seems to me to be PARTLY OWING TO THE STATE IN WHICH HE THEN WAS. He was already in some sense a saved man—he was a devout Israelite. He was a true seeker of the Messiah beneath the fig tree. Well, then, there were these things put together—there was a preparation of heart which was doubtless worked of God.

But this preparation did not bring him to Christ, though it made him ready for Christ. It brought him to God in prayer, but it did not bring him yet to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Then came Philip's instrumentality and then came Christ's Divine Word which convinced Nathanael and led him to put his trust in the Messiah. This is a sort of composite case and doubtless there are many in the Church of God, who, if you should ask them, "How were you converted?" would be somewhat puzzled to give the answer.

We find in our Church Meetings a very large proportion of people who say, "Well, I cannot trace my conversion to any one sermon—many sermons have impressed me—indeed, most do. I cannot say, Sir, that I was converted when I was a child, but I sometimes think I was, for even at that time I was the subject of many impressions and I certainly did offer prayer. Yet there was a time," they will tell you, "there was a time when I seemed to come out more distinctly into the Light. And when I could say of Christ, 'You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel,' but I cannot say exactly when the sun rose."

Now this, I think, was Nathaniel's case. Perhaps trained and brought up by godly parents, he had been in the habit of prayer—that prayer was somewhat ignorant—but it was very sincere. He sought the solitude of his shady garden and under the fig tree poured out his heart unto the Lord. That man is not saved. No! But there is a great part of the work done. Do not tell me that that man in his prayer has nothing in him more than the blasphemer. I tell you that he needs as much as the blasphemer does to have an effectual Word from Christ, but still there is a preparatory work in this man which there is not even in Philip, or in Simon Peter. There is a something, not meritorious, but still preparatory to the reception of the Gospel of Christ.

And when you labor for the conversion of such a man as this—and I do hope there may be some in this crowd—then it does not matter whether it is the ministry, or whether it is private instrumentality—there is sure to be good result because there is good ground to begin with. God has already furrowed and plowed the soil and so when the seed is scattered, there may be a little objection at first, but ultimately it will take root. Be looking out then, dear Friends, you who know how to talk to others about their souls! And wherever you see anything like devotion, even if it is mistaken and ignorant, look at that case! Be especially hopeful about it and try, if you can, to inform that person, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write."

Introduce Christ, talk of Jesus, bring these Nathanaels to Jesus—these who are like the honest and good ground, these men without guile or cunning—bring them to Jesus! Still, mark you, their prayers and your instrumentality will not be enough unless Christ shall meet them with some startling, soul-discovering Word and shall say, "Before that Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Ah, you seeking Soul, Christ sees you! Before you came here this morning Jesus saw you! Before you hear the challenge, "Look to Christ," Christ has looked upon you. If you are truly seeking in the loneliness of that upper room, or in that field behind the hedge, Jesus sees you!

When you are by the wayside and your heart is going up, "Lord, save me, or I perish," Jesus sees you! One of you has been writing to me this morning, and you say, "Pray for me that I may be saved, for I want to be saved." Ah, my Friend, if you want to be saved, Jesus wants to save you and so you are both agreed on that point! You, like Nathanael, are seeking Him. And I come this morning, like Philip and I long to bring you to Jesus, my Master. Oh, how I pray Him to speak to you and if so, He will tell you that He knew you when you were dead in sin and loved you, notwithstanding all!

And therefore He brought you to this House to hear His Word. Mark you, Nathanael's is the best case of the whole! He was favored above many. Who was the first man that ever had a promise from Christ? It was Nathanael! What was that? Why, that promise seems to me to be the sum of the Gospel—or rather the token-promise of the Gospel—which every Christian should carry in his hand. Jesus said, "Because I said unto you, I saw you under the fig tree, believe you? You shall see greater things than these." Nathanael was the first man who ever received a promise from the lips of the Lord Jesus when He was here on earth!

O you seeking Nathanaels, I think this is a promise for you—"You shall see greater things than these"—you shall see yourself pardoned! You shall see your prayers ascending Jacob's ladder and blessings coming down from God to rest upon your soul! I had hoped to have brought out many more points, but indeed, the chapter is too full for any to handle in so brief a time. You will observe, however, that I have given you just a glance at the surface of it which will suffice to show that the means of conversion and the general tenor of conversion will be found to differ in each case. Perhaps Nathanael's is the highest of all—he receives Christ in a fuller way than any of the others and he enjoys greater promises than they do.

But still they are all genuine, though they are not one of them like the other, except that John and Andrew may be put together. Judge not, therefore, your conversion by its means or by its particular form, but judge it by its fruit. Does it bring you to Jesus? Are you depending upon Him now? If so, go your way—your sins, which are many, are forgiven you! Eat the fat and drink the sweet, for God accepts you—therefore rejoice! But and if you have had a thousand conversions, if you are not resting on Jesus this morning, tremble, for your refuge is a refuge of lies! Your hope is a spider's web—God deliver you from it and bring you now to rest upon the finished work and the perfect Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus! And then, with Andrew and Peter and John, and Philip and Nathanael you shall meet before the Throne to praise Him who is the Son of God and the King of Israel! The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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