

# The Ministry of the Twelve

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

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*The sermon highlights the importance of Christ's selection of the Twelve Apostles and the principles of Christian service, emphasizing the need for fellowship, apostleship, and stewardship.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 115:1, Mark 3:13, Luke 10:1, John 4:35, Acts 18:10, Romans 10:15, 1 Corinthians 6:1

**Topics:** "Ministerial Work", "Christian Discipleship"

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## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas preaches about the importance of ministerial work, focusing on the preparation, plans, protection, proofs, and the call to service, character of the worker, and the consequence of labor. The sermon emphasizes the need for personal contact with Christ, the significance of a true confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the assurance and authority that come from a genuine experience with the Master. It highlights the principles of ministry, including prayer, preaching peace, and the importance of maintaining a constant dependence on God for guidance and strength.

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## Transcript

There were three great aspects of our Lord's earthly ministry: His Teaching, His Miracles, and His Training of the Twelve Apostles. Of these the last was in some respects the most important, because it had special reference to the future and to the permanent life and work of the Church of Christ. Indeed, we may almost say that His Teaching and His Miracles had their primary and fundamental value in the influence they made on the Twelve. At least they formed no small part of the training of the Apostles for their work in the Church. The best part of three years was given to this, and we can see how, as the public ministry became less and less fruitful, this work occupied more and more of our Lord's attention. Among the many aspects of the subject the following portions of the Gospel story will enable us to realize some characteristics of the ministry, as seen in our Lord's relation to the Twelve.

Section 1. The Choice (Mark 3:13-15, Luke 6:12 f.).

Out of the larger number of His disciples it was necessary for our Lord to select some to be His special followers and ministers. The occasion and circumstances of His choice of the Twelve are significantly brought before us in the Gospels.

I. When the Choice was made.

It was after a time of fellowship with God that Christ made the selection of the Twelve. On the mountain top, away from all earthly influences; at a time when all was still; and after prayer expressive of His constant fellowship with His Father, this important and far-reaching action was taken. His decision, as always, was the result of consultation with the Father, and of oneness with the Father's Will. "The Son can do nothing of Himself," and the time and circumstances of the choice of the Twelve show clearly the importance attached to it by our Lord and by the writers of the Gospels.

## II. How the Choice was made.

It was a personal choice. "He" appointed. He Himself made the selection as the result of prayer and thought, and as the outcome of His earlier relations with and knowledge of the men. Selection for the ministry must always come from Christ Himself, and must be due to His personal relation to the soul. It is only as this association is real, that any genuine choice can be made.

And it was a definite choice. "He ordained." He gave authority and ability (εξουσια, δυναμις). Christ never calls without equipping, never commissions without providing, never authorizes without empowering. "God's biddings are enablings." The man whom Christ ordains can always depend on grace sufficient.

III. Why the Choice was made. The primary reason was Fellowship; "that they might be with Him." This is, and must be first. "With" comes before "for". "They dwelt with the King for his work (1 Chron. 4:23). Labour never rises higher than life, faithfulness never higher than fellowship, conduct never higher than character. What we are conditions what we do, and to be what we ought to be we must abide in and with Christ. And all through their ministry the Twelve had this as their choicest privilege, they were "with Him," including all that this meant of wonderful instruction, holy influence and constant inspiration.

Instruction, Influence, Inspiration; these ever come as the result of being "with Christ". The second reason for the choice was Apostleship; "and send them forth." After "with Christ" comes "for Christ"; after privilege, service; after position, action. An Apostle is one "sent forth," and all through their ministry this was their privilege, duty, and responsibility. Mission! What a thought! "Sent" by Christ, as He was sent by the Father (John 20:21). Mission always implies Commission.

It is the Master's Commission that gives our Mission its blessing and guarantees its success. Every true minister is an "Apostle," one who is sent forth. "Ministers of His to do His pleasure." The third reason of the choice was Stewardship; "To preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils." The stewardship of preaching is the first function of the ministry. The minister is a "herald," one who proclaims the Gospel, i.e. the Good News. And this the Gospel always is, not good advice but good news, or rather, good advice as the outcome of Good News.

"Any news?" said Tennyson to an old woman friend of his in Lincolnshire. "No news, Mr. Tennyson, except that Christ died on the Cross!" "Well," replied the poet, "that is old news, and new news, and good news." The Stewardship of healing is included. We may not now have power to heal bodily sickness, but we are nevertheless to be healers in a very real sense, lifting burdens of soul, lightening pain of heart, and leading men into the presence of the Great Healer. The stewardship of deliverance is also always our work.

We have to cast out the demons of sin, of sorrow, of doubt, of despair, by the marvelous expulsive power of the new affection of the Gospel of Christ. This constitutes true ministry; Fellowship, Apostleship, Stewardship. To this Christ calls us; for this He chooses and equips us. And amid the multifarious duties

that crowd into our life, and tend to distract our thought, and dissipate our energies, we must never forget these primary functions of ministry. Fellowship, Apostleship, Stewardship.

Nothing must rob us of our position "with" Christ. Nothing must hinder us from exercising our Apostolic "Mission". Nothing must divert us from the stewardship of preaching, of healing, of deliverances. Then only shall we realize Christ's purpose in selecting us and sending us into His vineyard.

## Section 2. The Preparation (Luke 5:1-11).

Character is a most important study, whether in the pages of a biography, or in the life of any one with whom we may be brought in contact. To discover in a child or youth the characteristics of his nature, to notice his weakness and strength, to watch the gradual growth and expansion even amid slips and falls, and to see the character deepen and ripen until at length it reaches the vigour, balance, and mellowness of maturity; all this is at once extremely interesting and very valuable.

Among the many lives which are available for study in this way, few lend themselves more readily to consideration and scrutiny than that of the Apostle Peter. From the first notice of him in the New Testament he is seen to be a man of clearly marked individuality, and almost every reference to him enables us to note some salient feature in his character. The incident associated with the text was a most important step in his life, and one largely instrumental in making him what he afterwards became. It is essential to remember that this was not the first occasion on which our Lord met Simon. The fact of Christ's entrance unforbidden into the boat seems to imply familiarity. The story in St. John (Ch. 1) is the record of the enrolment of Simon as a disciple with the promise and prophecy of something different and higher in the future. What that was, how and when it was to be realized, were not then mentioned, but we can see the development by comparing the passage with our present one. "Thou shalt be called" (John 1:42). "Thou shalt catch" (Luke 5:10). The former suggested his future character, the latter his future work; and we see that this incident in St. Luke is the second link in the chain of our Lord's purpose with Simon. It is the call to Apostleship from Discipleship; and when we consider it in this light, as a preparatory call to higher office and more definite work, we find in it distinct though connected steps, by which the disciple was led up to Apostleship.

### I. The Revelation of the Master to the Disciple.

Before Simon could be and do what Christ desired, he must know more of his Master, and so we have a revelation with two clearly marked characteristics.

The gradualness of the revelation is very evident from the Greek and the Revised Version. At first Jesus said, "Put out a little from the land" in order that He might preach to the multitude from the boat. But this was not all. It was but secondary; for when He had finished speaking, He added, "Put out into the deep." Now we begin to see the object of the Master, Who at once adds, "And let down your nets for a draught." This Peter does, though not before telling Him of their night of fruitless toil.

We now see the second characteristic of this revelation; it was definite. The immediate result of the letting down of the net was the miraculous draught of fishes, and by that miracle Simon Peter realized that Jesus was someone out of the ordinary run of mankind, someone unique. This was our Lord's object; Peter was to see that His Messiahship involved His Divinity. The man's view of the Messiah was to a great extent the formal Jewish conception, and before he could become an Apostle he must have this erroneous idea removed. If our Lord was to gather round Him a band of disciples through whom He could work, it was

necessary that they should first be quite assured concerning their Master Himself. They must know Him not simply as a Teacher, they must know Him in Himself as the Son of God, and this was His object in performing the miracle. For the moment Simon could only wonder in astonishment, but by means of that wonder Christ entered more fully into and possessed more of His disciple's heart. This was the first revelation, that of the Master to the disciple; and it at once led to another.

II. The Revelation of the Disciple to Himself. The next requirement of the Lord Jesus was with reference to Peter himself, and we must see how it was brought about. For this purpose let us consider the immediate cause of the revelation. Peter saw the miracle and cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Now let us inquire carefully what there was in the miracle that should make Simon realize his sin. What was the connection between the miraculous draught of fishes and sin?

How is it we do not hear of any such connection with regard to other miracles? This question deserves very careful notice. It is generally supposed that somehow or other the disciple realized our Lord's marvelous holiness contrasted with his own lack of holiness, but is this certain? Why holiness in particular? On another occasion, very similar to this, as recorded in the last chapter of St. John, we read of Peter hurrying to meet our Lord immediately on recognizing Him after another miraculous draught of fishes, and yet at that time our Lord was none the less holy and Peter none the less sinful.

Indeed, coming so closely after the denial, one would have imagined the very opposite of Peter's eagerness to meet Christ. We must therefore seek the cause elsewhere, namely, in Simon's first reply to Jesus, "Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing, nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net." Are we quite sure we rightly understand the meaning of this answer? Is it possible that we do not catch the real tone of it? Very frequently it is put forward as a beautiful answer of reverent obedience, but is it so?

The men had been toiling all the night in the most suitable time for fishing: and the idea of telling fishermen to go and try again, in the morning was almost too much for Peter, and his reply seems to say, "I will do what you say, but I am sure it will not be of any use." This may be seen more clearly in another fact not always considered. Our Lord said, "Let down your nets" (plural); Peter replied, "I will let down the net" (singular) as though feeling quite certain it would be of no avail and that it was unnecessary to let down more than one net. [The text of the A.V. seems more intrinsically probable, even apart from the interpretation now suggested.]

The answer, therefore, was an untrustful yielding to Christ, and indicated a partial obedience only, as if to say, "I know more than you do." Then came the marvelous success and with it the vivid realization of the unworthy and sinful spirit he had been indulging. He now saw that Jesus knew better than he himself did, experienced fisherman though he was, and feeling how wrong he had been he cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Thus he saw himself as he really was, and the disciple was revealed to himself.

Now we can understand the real object of this revelation, for it was part of our Lord's purpose for Peter, and was of the utmost importance in relation to his life-work. With erroneous views of the Messiah among the Jews had come erroneous views of sin, its reality and enormity, and to have his sin brought home to him was the "one thing needful" for Simon Peter. He would thereby realize that the Messiahship had to do with hearts and consciences and not with national glory and power, that the rule of the Messiah was spiritual and not temporal, not earthly but Divine.

The consciousness of his own sinfulness, this humiliation of self, would also be a necessary and important preparation for his future work. Knowledge of self is one of the main elements of power in seeking to bless others, and we can see this throughout the Scriptures. Whenever God has work for men to do, He first causes them to feel their own nothingness and sinfulness. The history of Moses, of Gideon, of Isaiah, and of many others shows this clearly. Thus Peter, while he saw the power of Christ, had at the same time a vision of himself such as he had never had before. This is the second revelation, that of the disciple to himself. Now we can understand the meaning of the text and appreciate the third revelation.

III. The Revelation of the Master's Purpose concerning His Disciple. "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Notice the assuring call: "Fear not." Thus our Lord encouraged the sin-stricken disciple. "Depart"? Surely not; his sin was the very reason why Jesus should stay. "Depart"? Surely not; the Lord could see the man through the sin. Not only was the Master not to depart, but the disciple should henceforth have a very different work. He was no longer to catch fish; he should "catch men," should "take them alive" (R.V. margin).

And so the disciple learned the purpose of his Master and gained an insight into the reason of that wonderful change of name. Thereby he experienced that which would very effectively tend towards the change of nature and of work, the rocklike character and the Christian Apostleship. Then we have the prompt response. "They left all and followed Him." No more returning to their boats; now they were to be Apostles as well as disciples, from henceforth the intimate friends and trusted followers of their Lord, to be taught, guided, strengthened, blessed, and used by Him for His glory in the manifestation and realization of His Divine purpose and love.

Such were the three revelations whereby Peter was called to the Apostleship, and now it is only right to consider what these truths have to do with us. We may see this by retracing our steps by way of application. 1. Christ has a purpose with every disciple. To become an "Apostle," one sent forth by Him to others. Not, of course, in the unique sense of the Twelve, but nevertheless to become with a very real meaning, "fishers of men". This is the supreme object of our Christian life and discipleship, to bless others.

We are saved in order to serve, healed to help, redeemed to restore, delivered to declare. And to accomplish this Christ tests us, coming to us in ordinary everyday life to prove our capacity for higher service. There is a sad possibility of failure in partial obedience like Peter's, against which we need to be on our guard. 2. To fulfill this purpose we must know ourselves. We are sent to men who are sinners by nature and by practice, who show their sin in many different ways and degrees.

It is only by a knowledge of the human heart and conscience, mind and will, that we shall be able to deal with them. Just as the fisherman needs knowledge, tact and experience in his work, so do we in our dealings with others on behalf of Christ, and these are only possible through a knowledge of our heart and its plague. 3. To know ourselves we must know Christ. Not by mere introspection and self-examination shall we see ourselves; we can only truly see ourselves by looking at Christ.

In Him we see ourselves as in a mirror, and in His light of perfect holiness we really and truly see our own need of holiness. Thus by "looking off unto Jesus" we gain a true knowledge of ourselves, and a true knowledge of Him. There will be a lower idea of self and a higher conception of Him (cf. verse 5, "Master"; verse 8, "Lord"). In the possession of Him as our Saviour, in the surrender to Him as our Lord, and in the occupation of minds and hearts with Him as our Friend, we shall derive, as Peter did, the self-knowledge necessary for our effectual work for Him, and not only so, but "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord

we shall be changed into the same image" by the power of His Holy Spirit.

Let us then receive Him into our heart and life, and He will enter and bless us to others. Just as He used Peter's boat from which to preach to the people, so He will make a pulpit of our earthly life and work from which to manifest Himself to men. Our lives shall show that "Christ liveth in us," we shall "preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord," and our daily existence will be one blessed unfolding of His grace and blessing. Men seeing "Christ in us," and being "convinced that God is in us of a truth," shall themselves come to Him and go forth in turn to bless others.

So shall the blessings of true Christian discipleship and true Christian apostleship extend from heart to heart, and from individual to individual; so shall the heart of Christ rejoice in the ever-increasing growth of His kingdom, the ever-widening influence of His power, and the ever-deepening blessing of His grace, until at length His purpose in sending men forth shall be accomplished, the last one shall have been gathered in, the last one "caught," and our Lord shall "see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied."

### Section 3. The Principles (John 6:1-14).

The miracle of the five thousand is in all four Gospels, the only one found in all. There must be some good reason for this prominence. The moment was critical, pivotal in our Lord's ministry. The feelings of the people for Him were such that as the immediate result of this miracle they endeavoured to make him a King. But He escaped out of their power, and on His reappearance next day delivered those discourses in Capernaum which so startled and shocked His hearers that His popularity suddenly began to wane, and for the rest of His Ministry He was virtually left alone with the Twelve, for the special work He had come to do. The miracle was therefore at once a crisis and a symbol of our Lord's higher spiritual work. He had not come to be King, but to give himself as the Bread of Life, the Bread of God for the world.

But the miracle can also be taken symbolically in another way; it may be regarded as a parable for workers. Christ and His disciples here indicate what Christ still desires to do through His workers, and the miracle reveals several of the deepest principles of Christian service.

#### I. Coworkers with Christ.

He took counsel with them; "Whence": and associated them with Himself; "We." This is what He always desires to do. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (Gen. 18:17). "The Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants" (Amos 3:7). "We, then, as workers together with Him" (2 Cor. 6:1). This is the joy, the honour, the inspiration of all service; our association with Christ, our fellowship with Him in the accomplishment of His purposes for the world. He might have done the work without us, but He has been pleased to permit us to be His ministers, carrying His Bread to the world.

#### II. An Apparently Impossible Task.

What a startling call! "Give ye them to eat." How could they? They had nothing, or what was practically nothing. And yet the Master said, "They need not depart." The strong confidence of this word is evident. What does it mean? This, that Christians have what the world needs. The Master's word rings out: "They need not go; you provide," and in saying this He called His disciples to a task apparently impossible, but really practicable, because He Himself was behind every word He said.

#### III. The Use of Natural Means.

To feed the multitude Christ utilized the five loaves and two fishes as the foundation of the supply. He might and could have done without them, but He used them as far as they would go. Herein lies one of the deepest principles of the Bible and of God's method. He uses means. The miracles of the Old and New Testaments are usually wrought with existing agencies. Natural means are employed to the full extent of their possibility, and then supernatural power is added to them. There was no new creation, but simply the use of what was available as the means or channel of manifesting Divine supernatural power. In a similar way Christ uses the natural characteristics of His disciples as far as they will go and makes them of service in His vineyard. He takes us as we are and utilizes what we have, for His Glory.

#### IV. The Secret of Blessing.

The disciples were commanded to bring what they possessed to the Master, and then He blessed them and made them sufficient for the need of the multitude. The same principle obtains today. "Bring to Me." Let us bring to Him whatever we have, for "Loaves unblessed are loaves unmultiplied." We must have His blessing if we are to be of service to others.

#### V. The Divine Employment of Moderate Means.

Through the blessing of Christ on the five loaves and two fishes the men, women, and children were "filled," and through the blessing of Christ on our lives, poor and insignificant though they are, the multitudes will be "filled". Moses was commanded to cast down his rod, and it became a serpent. His rod was just the ordinary shepherd's crook of his daily calling, and yet by the power of God it could become transformed. Our ordinary life, sinful though it be; our natural capacities, few though they be, can be employed by God and produce wonderful results in His service. It is a great fundamental and well known principle that size never determines power. When Zinzendorf was at school he founded the "Guild of the Grain of Mustard Seed," and we know the result in the Moravian Church. Be it ours, therefore, to surrender everything to Christ, to trust Him with everything, to obey Him in everything, and then He will send us forth to fill and satisfy hungry, fainting souls; blessed to be a blessing.

Only one talent small,

Scarce worthy to be named,

Truly He hath no need of this.-

O! art thou not ashamed?

He gave that talent first,

Then use it in His strength,

Thereby, thou know'st not, He may work

A miracle at length.

Many the starving souls,

Now waiting to be fed,

Needing, though knowing not their need

Of Christ the Living Bread.  
If thou hast known this love,  
To others make it known,  
Receiving blessings, others bless;  
No seed abides alone.  
And when thine eyes shall see  
The holy ransomed throng,  
In heavenly fields, by living streams,  
By Jesus led along.  
Unspeakable thy joy,  
And glorious thy reward,  
If by thy barley loaves, one soul  
Has been brought home to God.

#### Section 4. The Secret (Matt. 14:18, 17:17).

As the Christian life is not complex, but simple; so also it is with Christian service. It can be reduced to a few great but simple truths. It really means nothing more, as it can mean nothing less, than the full and constant contact of the soul with Christ. In these two passages now before us we find the disciples in the one case face to face with a great work, and in the other with a great failure. The lesson in both was the need of personal contact with Christ; "Bring to Me."

#### I. Work.

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, as we have seen, may be also regarded as a parable of Christian service. There are three great pictures.

1. The perishing world. The people were in great need. Hunger had produced want and weakness.
2. The powerless disciples. Their store was small, limited, insufficient, and in face of the multitude they were powerless. "Whence?"
3. The Perfect Saviour. "He Himself knew what He would do," and when once the disciples had brought their little, He blessed, and gave, and fed the crowds.

Today's task is great, almost beyond compare. The world is in need of Christ, whether it knows it or not. Sin ever produces want and weakness. The hunger of the soul is seen everywhere today.

Today's means are also scanty. The Church knows not what to do. "Whence?" The multitudes at home, in palace, castle, house, and slum; the heathen abroad in China, Japan, India, Africa, all tell of apparent

powerlessness on the part of the Church to cope with the situation.

But, thank God, today's secret is the same as of yore. "Bring." As Bushnell in one of his spiritual paradoxes says, "Duty is not measured by our ability." Duty is measured by His ability, and "responsibility" is really our response to His ability. So, for work let us ever remember the secret of perpetual sufficiency. "Bring."

But it is to the other passage that we specially desire to turn.

II. Failure (Matt. 17:17). The circumstances of the healing of the demoniac boy are full of spiritual meaning for workers. Again there are three pictures. 1. The People. At the foot of the hill the crowd waited, surrounding the disciples and feeling disappointed and distressed. The youth had been brought with high hopes of a perfect cure, and the result had been failure. The disciples could not cast out the evil spirit. 2. The Disciples. What a humiliation for them! The failure was as complete as it was unwarranted.

They had received the power, and yet they had not cast out the demon. 3. The Master. When He learned what it was, He at once took the matter in hand and dealt with it satisfactorily. He overruled the error, told them to bring the youth to Him, and soon the boy and his father were rejoicing in complete deliverance. When the disciples asked Him privately the secret of their failure He told them frankly that it was due to their lack of prayer (and fasting). Today's task is equally great.

There are demons to be cast out and spiritual maladies to be healed. Today's means are equally ample. Christ never commands us to "Go," without first assuring us that He has all power (Matt. 28:18). There is grace sufficient in Christ to meet every need, and we need not, ought not to fail. Today's secret is equally clear. It lies in faithfulness to Christ, the faithful use of the power He gives, faithful obedience to the truth He teaches. Our great danger today as workers is spiritual leakage.

There is no need of failure, for Christ has all power and has provided grace. As Dr. Jowett says: "We do not get close enough to men because we do not get near enough to God. (1) We are drawn away by the gravitation of the world; its manner, thought, feeling, purposes. (2) By the fascination of the glittering; the praise of men, not honour of God. (3) By the stupefying influences of our office." [Notes of an address to ministers at Northfield, Mass., U.S.A., reported in the Christian Workers' Magazine (Chicago), 1909.]

And the result is utter, disastrous, heartbreaking failure. How then is this danger to be avoided? In a very simple way. We must maintain an attitude of constant dependence on God. "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." We retain the word "fasting" here, in spite of the reading of the R.V., because of its essential truthfulness. Prayer and Fasting represent the two sides, the positive and negative, of the one attitude of the soul. Prayer is the attachment of the soul to God.

Fasting is the detachment of the soul from the world. There are two methods of progress today in connection with motors and tram cars. The one is by the storage principle, by means of which so much petrol or electricity is provided and used, and then a fresh supply given. The other is by the contact principle, by which the car keeps in touch with the electric power above it or below it, and moves or stands still as it is, or is not, in contact. There are many Christians who seem to think that the storage principle is the true way of living, but it is not.

God does not give so much grace for use until exhausted. He requires us to keep in touch with Himself and find therein our sole and our sufficient means of supply. We lose power and blessing because we do

not realize the profound truth that Christ does not give inherent ability to any worker. He does not expect grace to be used apart from Himself and then to be replenished when exhausted. Grace is nothing so material as this. Grace is relationship, and its power depends on the maintenance of that relationship by a constant attitude of faith and obedience.

Discontinue the attitude, and grace fails to work. Maintain the attitude, keep up the contact, and grace works in and through us to will and to do of God's pleasure. How may this contact be maintained? By prayer, by the Word, by the Spirit. "Bring to Me." Keep "in touch" with Christ, the Source of prayer. By prayer we speak to God; by the Bible God speaks to us, and when these two are made real by the Spirit Who is "the Spirit of grace and supplication," we find the contact maintained, and the life kept, blessed, energized, used to the glory of God.

#### Section 5. The Test (Matt. 16:13-19).

The Galilean ministry was over. The Master and His disciples had withdrawn to Caesarea to prepare for the end. They had been with Him some time now, and in view of the future it was essential to know what had been the results of the teaching and fellowship they had enjoyed. After a period of training and teaching comes the examination, and now the Twelve were to undergo an inquiry as to the precise spiritual value of their experience of their Master.

##### I. The Inquiry.

The Lord's first question was: "Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?" i.e. "What do men say of Me?" This in itself is of small account and involved no spiritual insight on their part. It was probably only asked to lead up to the next question: "But you, what do you say of Me?" The final question was their own personal view of Christ. As Professor W. M. Clow aptly says, there is a world of difference between a verdict and a confession. The former question involved the verdict of their contemporaries; the latter demanded a personal acknowledgment from themselves. The one thing essential was a true personal attitude to Christ, and then right ideas of Christ. The Master's first message was, "Follow Me," and they had done so. Now it is, "What think ye of Me?" Right ideas arise, and always will arise, out of a right attitude to Christ. It is only the follower who thinks rightly.

Herein lies the final question of the ministry. What is our attitude to Jesus Christ? Everything depends on this. Failure here means failure everywhere.

##### II. The Confession.

Peter's reply expressed what he and they had come to think concerning Christ. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." His Messiahship and His Divinity; these two were everything. In relation to the Old Testament hopes he was "the Christ," the Anointed One. In relation to God, "the Son of the living God".

The Divinity of Christ! Or, rather, as we are compelled to put it today, the Deity of Christ. This constitutes the fundamental confession because the final need of every soul. And of course it must ever be a life, and not merely a Creed. The confession of Peter was the result of personal contact with Christ. They had "compared with Him," and the experience of those hallowed, unforgettable days had created and deepened in them the conviction that their Master was none other than the Anointed One, the Son of the Living God. This, and nothing less, is still the foundation of all ministry. For salvation, for sanctification, for service, we must have an Anointed One, a Divine Saviour and Lord. As Bishop Moule says: "A Saviour not

quite God is a bridge broken at the farther end."

### III. The Acknowledgment.

The disciple was pronounced "blessed" for making so definite a confession. It is always so. The possession and confession of a living Divine Lord always and necessarily brings "blessing".

And the source of it is spiritual discernment: "For flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." From fellowship had come faith; from experience, conviction. Personal experience is essential to all true service. We must have seen and heard and felt in order to be able to speak, and a ministry that is not based on personal conviction and personal experience will be useless and even dangerous. Flesh and blood cannot reveal the secrets of ministerial spiritual blessing; they must come from the Father in heaven.

### IV. The Assurance.

To such a confession was added a twofold revelation of assurance. A new character was declared to be his. In the old days (John 1:42) at the outset the word was, "Thou art Simon ... thou shalt be called." Now the "shalt be called" is changed into the "art," the future into the present. He was now the Rock-like man as the outcome of personal experience of Christ.

And a new work was given. Christ would build His Church on Peter thus confessing Him. Not on the man alone; that would be too weak. Not on the confession alone; that would be too abstract. But on both man and confession together, on the man confessing. [Lindsay, *The Church and Ministry in the Early Centuries*. p. 25 ff.] It is as though the Master said, "Give Me a man who believes as the outcome of personal confession, and My Church shall stand on that as on a sure foundation." And the man is to hold and use the keys. He is given authority, and his work shall be that of opening and shutting the gates of the Kingdom (not the Church). Such a man with such an experience is alone qualified to wield his authority. Gehazi may be nominally in the service of Elisha, but the personal power had long gone. The man was an undeveloped hypocrite before the denouement came. It is personal experience that gives authority to word and deed, and personal experience is the only basis of service.

Thus the Master tested His disciples, put them through their examination, and subjected them to the severest possible proof. The question remains for us: What is our attitude to Him? Have these months, or years, wrought in us a personal experience of Him? If they have, we are blessed, and we cannot help being useful in His vineyard. If they have not, then whatever else we may have and know, we shall be of no service in the ministry, for the ministry is absolutely dependent on men who by personal contact with Christ have arrived at a personal experience, and can tell out that experience by lip and life, and thus witness and win for the Master.

### Section 6. The Work (Luke 10:1-24).

Two Missions were sent forth by Christ during His earthly ministry: that of the Twelve (Mark 3:13-14), and that of the Seventy (Luke 10:1). The record of our Lord's instructions reveals both similarities and differences, but they are both alike in being concerned with principles of work. So after looking at some of the aspects of ministerial character, it is necessary and appropriate to consider some of the elements of ministerial service. Our Lord's words embody principles for guidance in doing His work.

#### I. Preparation (verses 1-4).

The true minister will be Divinely appointed (verse 1): "The Lord appointed." This must ever be the foundation of all work. "How shall they preach, except they be sent" (Rom. 10:15).

The true minister will be Divinely encouraged (verse 2). What a picture our Lord draws of broad fields, abundant crops, ripened grain, and few labourers. What is the meaning of this reference to the abundant harvest? It is not the only time He alluded to it (John 4:35). Are we quite sure we have grasped the true and full import of the term "harvest"? The Lord did not speak of the opportunities for seed sowing, but for harvest. He thought that men were ready to be reaped. Would it not be well now if we thought less of the seed sowing and more of the harvest, less of the future and more of the present? We expect that someday we, or someone else, will reap what now we sow. But the Lord speaks of a present harvest. When Paul was in Corinth the Lord told him He had much people there when as yet only a handful were gathered (Acts 18:10). And in every congregation many are just waiting to be gathered and garnered. Let this be our encouragement, and let us endeavour to reap as well as sow.

The true minister will be Divinely instructed (verse 24). Prayer is the first element of instruction. "Pray ye." Prayer must always be a powerful feature in every true ministry. Intercessory prayer prepares the way for our message, and the more we pray the more successful our labours will be. Action must follow prayer: "Go." They must work as well as pray. They were to go confidently: "I send you forth." They were to go unencumbered: "Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes"; and unanxious: "Salute no man by the way." Time was fleeting. There was no opportunity for the elaborate politeness of the Eastern salutation. So is it ever. In spite of the dangers, we may go without fear, and our soul must be in earnest as we drop what might be an encumbrance, or set aside what might be a hindrance to our work. Time presses. Souls are passing from us. We must have our eye on the clock of opportunity, and while courteous, kind, and thoughtful, we must spend no time or strength on things that are meaningless and empty. Consecration must be seen in Concentration if our ministry is to be what God desires.

## II. Plans (verses 5-11).

The salutation to be given is noteworthy (verses 5 f.). The opening word was characteristic of their message: "Peace". The Gospel of Peace is the essential characteristic of the message of Redemption. So also the God of Peace is the most frequently found title of God in the New Testament. Peace on earth was the angels' song. "Preaching peace by Jesus Christ" was the Apostolic message. "Be ye reconciled to God" is our call today, for "He is our peace." No one will ever preach the Gospel aright who does not make very prominent, perhaps predominant, this message of Peace. Peace between God and man through Redemption; and then peace between man and man; peace between the elements of man's own nature as the result of peace with God, for "being justified by faith we have peace."

Their ministrations followed their salutation (verses 7-9). Their behaviour is first of all indicated (verses 7 f.). It is our life that tells. It must ever be Christ, not self. We must accept what we find in the spirit of these instructions. Their work was to be healing (verse 9), and their testimony the nearness and imminence of the Kingdom of God (verse 9). If they were not received, they were to leave and bear witness, rebuking them in the name of their God (verse 10 f.). Along these lines we have still to travel, labouring, preaching, witnessing, warning, and rebuking. He is the true minister who lives and works according to these plans.

## III. Protection (verses 12-16).

But there is another side. They are not to go alone, or at their own charges. He Who sends, supplies. He Who I commands, controls. He Who commissions, keeps.

Their opponents are to be condemned (verses 12-15). Those who will not heed shall be brought into judgment. We need have no fear if after faithful preaching there are no results. Results are God's; processes ours; and if we fulfill our part, we can leave the rest to Him.

Their hearers are to be honoured (verse 16). What a privilege, an unspeakable privilege, to be assured that "He that heareth you, heareth Me." Could anything be more inspiring and encouraging to the faithful preacher?

Their rejectors are to be dishonoured: "He that despiseth you despiseth Me." This is also true. If our message is God's, not our own, the rejection of it is a rejection of Him, not of us. This, too, however sad in consequences, should encourage the preacher amid difficulties.

IV. Proofs (verses 17-24). The joyful return resulted (verse 17). The men set out according to the instructions given and in due course returned with joy, bearing witness to the effects (verse 17). It is always so. God's Word never returns void, and the man who proclaims it will have results which will afford him what is perhaps the most exquisite joy on earth, the joy of soul-winning. The wise warning followed (verses 18-20). The Master told them that He had been noting their work ("I saw," verse 18).

He also explained the success as due to His own gift (verse 19). And He bade them guard against spiritual pride, lest they fell into the snare of the devil (verse 20). How necessary these words are for all earnest soul-winners, experience abundantly shows. The successful minister is tempted to think that his success is due to his own powers, and he "burns incense" to his own net. Spurgeon said a wise word when he remarked that the reason why God does not allow us to see more fruit from our labours is that on the top of the harvest load we should probably feel giddy and fall down.

Everywhere and always when success crowns our efforts, we must sing our *Non nobis, Domine*; "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us" (Psalm 115:1). The Divine satisfaction, however, could not be withheld (verses 21-24). The Master's joy in the disciples' success is evident (verse 21), and His testimony to their faithfulness on this account is all the more striking. He saw that a work of Divine grace was going on in these hearts, crude, elementary, and unspiritual as they were, and for this He praised God.

And then He turned to His disciples and gave them the heartiest and highest possible encouragement, as He contrasted their lot with that of their forefathers, and the superior spiritual privileges they enjoyed (verses 23-24). Bruce suggests that evangelistic efforts were probably distasteful to the fastidious classes of society, and that herein lies the explanation of our Lord's satisfaction. Popular religious movements are usually objectionable to polite society. Foster's Essay suggests this in its very title, on "The Aversion of Men of Taste to Evangelical Religion."

Making every allowance, and taking every precaution, this will probably always be the case. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Meanwhile the Master's work must go on by means of the Master's disciples, in the Master's way, and for the Master's glory. Then will come the Master's satisfaction and the Master's praise - and if the Master praises, "what are men"?

And so we find in this varied work three great aspects of ministry. 1. The Call to Service. It comes from Christ as "Lord of the Harvest". It is due to the great need, "fields white"; and it is pointed by the sad fact that there are so very few to engage on it; "the labourers are few." 2. The Character of the Worker. Summing up all that we find here, we observe the elements of Simplicity, Earnestness, Winsomeness, and

Faithfulness. Let us ever test ourselves by these. 3. The Consequence of Labour.

We see what the Lord told His disciples to expect: Blessing, Knowledge, Fellowship, Satisfaction. The ministry is therefore at once arduous and glorious, the noblest and the most difficult of tasks, the highest and the holiest of enterprises.

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