

PEOPLE OF THE HOLY BIBLE

7. Peter's Three Calls

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“And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus” John 1:37.

“And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” Matthew 4:18, 19.

“And he called unto him his twelve disciples... the first, Simon, who is called Peter” Matthew 10:1, 2.

Perhaps you are aware that there has always been a certain set of persons who have tried to disprove the gospel narrative by picking out what they suppose to be discrepancies, especially in the statements of Matthew and Luke. Four independent persons have each given us a separate story of the Life of Christ, each story being written with a distinct object. Of course, from the fact that each one was written with a distinct object, it was natural that one evangelist should give more attention to certain points in the history of Christ than the others, and it was natural for his eye to be fixed upon those things which most concerned the point which he had in hand, and for his ear to be most quick to catch those words which had a relation to the object he was driving at throughout the whole of his gospel. Now, these divergences and differences have been so many pegs upon which quibblers have hung their quibbles, and these men have constantly been saying, “How do you reconcile Matthew with John in a certain place, or how do you reconcile Mark, in such another place, with Luke?” Now, it is not always easy to harmonize the testimony of four perfectly honest witnesses upon the same subject. I will venture to say, that if there should be a simple accident upon the railway, and

four persons present were to give their accounts of it with rigid exactness, yet they would each one be likely to mention some point not mentioned by the other, and, moreover, differ upon the points which they notice in common. Although we might be morally convinced that they all spoke the truth, yet it would be difficult to put the story together so as to make a harmonious whole of it. Sometimes it is not easy to put the stories of the Evangelists together, and many of the “Gospel Harmonies,” so called, which have been produced by very admirable writers, are not quite correct, but show at once the difficulty attaching to that which some brethren have been trying to attempt, and which perhaps will never be fully carried out, namely, the making of it into one harmonious idyl.

It so happens, however, that the difficulty in the case before us is no difficulty at all. John tells us that Peter was called by Christ through the preaching of John the Baptist, who bore witness that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. Matthew, on the other hand, tells us that Peter and his brother were fishing, that Christ was walking by the lake of Galilee, and that as he passed by he saw these men fishing, called them by name, and said, “Follow me.” Now, the key to the whole may be found in the fact that there was yet a third call, and that afterwards Jesus called, not Peter and Andrew alone, but the whole twelve of his disciples, and set them apart to be apostles; and so we gather from this last call that the other two might perhaps have been different and distinct from each other. Coming to look at the subject we find that the first call was the call at Peter’s conversion, which called him to be a disciple while still at his daily avocation; the second was the call of Peter, not to be a mere disciple, but to be an evangelist; and the third was the call of Peter, not to be an evangelist or a common servant of the Master, but to be a leader, to take a yet higher grade, and to become one of the twelve who should be associated with Christ as the founders of the new system of religion, and

witnesses of the life of Christ himself.

Firstly I want you, then, just for a moment to bear in mind that we have under our consideration THREE CALLS:

1. The first is, that which Christ gave to Peter when he called him out of darkness into marvellous light, blessing to him at first the testimony of John, and then by manifesting himself to him.

2. The second is, the call by which the servant already converted, already willing, is bidden to put himself into closer relationship with his Lord, to come out and be no longer a servant whose allegiance is true but not manifest, but to show that fealty by following his Master.

3. And the third call is, that which the Saviour gives only to a few whom he has picked out and chosen to do some special work, who shall have fellowship with him more closely still, and become captains in the ranks of "*The sacramental host of God's elect.*"

We shall speak of these three calls in the order in which they occur. Very briefly I shall go through the subject, speaking at length about the second call which Peter received.

1. Notice the personal call to be a disciple. These three calls are given in a certain order. Observe where it begins. Peter was not called to be an evangelist before he was called to be a follower. Christ begins by first teaching us our own need of him, and our own sin, and then revealing himself to us as the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. It is a presumption — what if I say an accursed treason — against the Majesty of the great Head of the Church, if any man pretends to reverse this order. You must first be called yourselves into Christ before you may dare to even so much as think about being called into the ministry or into the service of Christ. You cannot serve him until first of all you have learned to sit at his feet. Before you can serve God you must have a new heart and a right spirit. The blind eye is not fit for the service of Christ.

The eye must be illuminated, the understanding must be instructed. That stubborn will of yours cannot bear the yoke of Christ; it must be subdued. "Ye must be born again." Should there be some among you here tonight who are teaching in Sunday-schools, distributing tracts, or in any other way are trying to serve God, and yet are not yourselves saved, I would very affectionately, but with great earnestness, entreat you to consider that you are reversing the natural and proper order of things. Your first business is at home, in your own soul and your own heart. I will not apply to you the words of the prophet, "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" But I think there is a spirit in those terrible words, which might well have an application to you. How can you be a guide until you are first able yourself to see, for "if the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into the ditch?" How can you, diseased and leprous, begin to heal others, for it shall be said to you, "Physician, heal thyself?" How can you when the beam is in your own eye go abroad to point out the beams and the motes, which are in other men's eyes? Oh! take care, take care lest this very service to Christ, as you think it, be an injury to you, for you may serve Christ after a sort till you begin to think that you do so much, and do it so well, that you must be a Christian. You may spin for yourself a robe, which shall seem sufficient to cover you withal, and you may go and dress in this cobweb, this mere figment of a fictitious righteousness, and persuade yourself that you are wearing the robe of Christ's righteousness, whereas you shall be found at the last to be naked, and poor, and miserable. Oh! I pray you to understand those meaning words, "Behold the Lamb of God." Behold him for yourselves, see him for yourselves. Do not talk about being a fisher of men; do not speak of being a servant whose loins are girt, and whose lamp is trimmed, until first you have become as a little child, for unless you so become you cannot enter into the

kingdom of heaven.

2. But, dear friends, after the first call has been received, it is very delightful to observe the Christian receiving the second. He is called into active service. Simon Peter became a disciple, but all that he meant by that was, "I acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah," and he went away and continued with his good brother in the fishing business. It never, perhaps, entered into his head that he was to do anything more than to cultivate a quiet peaceful faith, and walk in a life consistent therewith. But on a sudden he sees this famous man of Nazareth walking by the sea-side, who addresses him by name, and says to him, "Follow me;" and in a moment, putting down his net, and leaving his relative with his two companions James and John, equally famous in the battle-roll of Christian heroes, he left all to follow Christ.

Now, I may have some here to-night who are saved. You are the disciples of Jesus, but I regret to know that he has not yet been seen by you as calling you into his service. You have joined the church, and you have been baptized into the faith of Christ, and so far it is good; but as yet it has not struck you that you are to be actively engaged for Christ. Now, it is not in my power to call you to the service, nor to indicate to you what special form that service shall take; but, my dear friends, I do pray that you may have another revelation of the Lord Jesus yet more full and bright, and that he may say to you, "Come, man, thou art not thine own; thou art bought with a price; serve me; arise, gird up thy loins, and wait upon the Lord." I trust that he may lay his hand upon you to-night, and say to you as he did to the assembled twelve, "As my Father hath sent me into the world even so send I you;" and may you have grace to obey the mandate, and though it may be something which has been distasteful to you, some Christian engagement in which you have never been occupied before, may you have grace to say "Here am I, Lord, send me," whatever the business may

happen to be. Ah! what would a church be if it consisted altogether of persons of this sort? What vigour should we have in the Christian army if every soldier felt called to fight! But some of you do not realize your duty in this respect. I would that you would take a farther step. I would that the spirit of service fell upon you, so that you did not merely wear the robe of righteousness but the mantle of service too.

Oh! brethren, by the love which

***“Saw you ruined in the fall,
Yet loved you notwithstanding all,”***

by the love which gave up its honour and its glory, and took upon itself the form of a servant for your sakes; by the love which sweat great drops of blood in the garden, by the love which emptied out its heart that you might be redeemed from ruin, I pray you, hear Jesus saying to you, “Follow me;” and do follow him, follow him in active, industrious, persevering consecration, and from this day forth, if you have hitherto been but a sleeping partner in the great Christian firm, if you have been content to ride upon the gospel chariot, instead of drawing it or adding an impulse to its wheels, may you say, “My Lord, fill me with the zeal which possessed thee; kindle in me the same spirit of service which burned so brightly in thyself, and as thou didst call Peter, and Andrew, and James, and John, so do thou call me,” and say, “Follow me.” You notice, then, that this second call follows the first call, and it is a blessed thing when it does thus succeed and is obeyed.

3. But in the third text, which I gave you, you find Peter called to another service above that of an ordinary worker, that is to say, he is called to be an apostle.

I will venture here to trace an analogy between this and the calling of the Christian minister. You will observe that this call comes last. The call to the apostleship does not come first. Peter is first the catechumen or disciple; secondly, the

evangelist; and thirdly, the apostle. So, no man is called to be specially set apart to the ministry of Christ, or to have a share in the apostleship until he has first of all himself known Christ, and until, secondly, as an ordinary Christian he has fully exercised himself in all the duties which are proper to Christian service. Now, some people turn this topsy-turvy. Young men who have never preached are set apart to the ministry, those who have never visited the sick, never instructed the ignorant, and are totally devoid of any knowledge of gospel experience except the little of their own, are supposed to be dedicated to the Christian ministry. I believe this to be a radical and a fatal error. Brethren, we have no right to thrust a brother into the ministry until he has first given evidence of his own conversion, and has also given proof not only of being a good average worker but something more. If he cannot labour in the church before he pretends to be a minister, he is good for nothing. If he cannot whilst he is a private member of the church perform all the duties of that position with zeal and energy, and if he is not evidently a consecrated man whilst he is a private Christian, certainly you do not feel the guidance of God's Holy Spirit to bid him enter the ministry. No man has a right to aspire to come into that office until, like the knights of old, he has first won his spurs, and has shown that he is really devoted to Christ by having served him as others have done. Let me say that it would be a very great mercy for this Christian church if some persons would not take this last place at all, but would be content to stop in the second one. There are many men who when set apart to the Christian ministry are a drag and burden to the churches as well as to other people, who if they had but given up themselves as ordinary members to Christian service might have been a very great blessing and honour to the church. One of the kindest pieces of advice I could give to some of our ministerial friends would be, "Go home, brother; take off your black coat and your white tie, and

put yourself into some honest way of getting a living; just think whether you were not more serviceable to the church when you were a carpenter or a tradesman, and when you were earning a considerable sum of money at your own ordinary avocation, than you are now, when you are necessarily dependent upon the gifts and liberality of God's servants without having the ability and the talent which are necessary to make you a leader in the Lord's host." I pray the day may come when we shall all see this, and never think of giving ourselves to the ministry before conversion, and even then aspire not after special work until first of all we have proved that we can serve the Lord in our ordinary life.

Occasionally I have brethren come to me asking to be received into our College, and one singular reason which some of them give me why they believe that they are called to the ministry is this: "You see, sir, I could not get on at anything else, and therefore I thought Providence must have ordained me to be a minister." I never say a word about that, but I am very clear that if a man is such a fool that he can do nothing else but preach, it is a great pity that he should be allowed to do that; and when a brother tells me that, I sometimes venture to ask him if he thinks that God wants the biggest fools to serve him, whether there should not rather be given up to God's service the very pick, and prime, and flower of the Christian church, those men who, if they had addicted themselves to commerce, might have taken the lead therein, or who, if they had given themselves to the bar or to the profession of surgery or medicine, would have stood in the front rank? I believe, brethren, we want strong men to take such a position, and that the Lord Jesus Christ has a keen eye, and when he does call a man he calls him to something that he is fit for. Take the cases of Peter and Paul. Peter was a fisherman, it is true; but a fisherman of such a peculiar breed that it would be well if God would find us more of the same

sort, who would become fishers of men; and as for Paul, he was one well skilled and learned in all matters, and just fitted and adapted to the work which the Master gave him to do.

I have thus noticed these three calls; but I want now, secondly, to direct your earnest and particular attention to the second call, because of the lessons to be learnt from the CHARACTER OF THE MEN CHOSEN, AND THE NATURE OF THE WORK entrusted to them.

The second call is recorded in the fourth chapter of Matthew and the eighteenth verse; and it deserves our attention, because we perceive that these brethren were called to the service of Christ whilst they were engaged in their ordinary avocations.

It seems to have been early in the morning, for Peter was just starting on his work, and was casting his net into the sea; and in the twenty first verse we find that James and John were mending their nets, so that they were all industrious in their ordinary calling. There is a notion abroad amongst some persons that they cannot serve God unless they neglect their ordinary work. This used to be a complaint brought against the Methodists in the olden time. I believe it was a great falsehood; but it was stated that they were so earnest in listening to sermons that they made bad servants and bad trades people. If it was so it was a very grievous fault, but I do not think it ever was the case. However, let none of us fall into it. If I were a Christian and a fisherman, I should like to catch more fish than anybody else. If I were a Christian and a shoe-black, I should desire to clean people's boots so that they shone better than any other shoe-black could make them shine. If I were a Christian master, I should desire to be the best master, and if a Christian servant the best servant. Our Christianity, I think, shows itself more, at any rate to the world, in the pursuits of daily life, than it does in the engagements of the house of God. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." I scarce need give that exhortation here,

but when you do assemble yourselves together, come not up to God's house having the blood of other duties upon your spirits. You are a mother with little children, and it is probably your duty to be at home rather than to be at the prayer meeting. It may sometimes be your business, as a husband, to take turns with your wife, and let her come out to the house of God, instead of always taking the privilege yourself. It may be the case with some of you that your trade may absolutely require you to be behind the counter both on lecture and on prayer-meeting night, and though I would have you here if possible, and if you do go anywhere go to the house of God, yet do not let it ever be said, or even whispered, that you did not attend to your business, and that you came to grief because the things of God were cared for, and your business in consequence neglected. I think it never should be so. I like to recollect that after Jesus Christ had gone away; after he was crucified, died, had been buried, and had risen again, where did he find Peter? Why, he found him fishing again! That is right, Peter. Follow Christ by all manner of means when he bids you, but when there is nothing to do in the service of Christ come back to fishing again. Oh! but some people seem to think that hard work in attending to ordinary business is not spiritual-minded in a Christian. Nonsense! Out with that difficulty, if any of you are troubled by it. Just ask the Lord to clear your brains, and brush away such cobwebs as these, for we shall never have genuine Christianity in the world while such nonsense remains. Nonsense about giving up the world, meaning thereby living in laziness! The truest Christian is the working man, who so labours for God that he does not neglect the common duties of life. The best form of Christianity is found in the Christian who is a Christian behind the counter, a Christian on 'Change, a Christian in the street, a Christian in the marketplace, a Christian anywhere; and who, wherever and whenever he may be found, is like his Master — "diligent in business, fervent in

spirit, serving the Lord.”

I think no man will ever serve Christ aright who does not show some energy in other things. I think the Saviour chose these two men, not only out of sovereign grace unto salvation, but also because he saw about them a zeal in the pursuit of fishery which seemed to mark them out as being the very men to be made useful in his own cause. Notice the character of the men who were thus called to work for Christ; they were active, diligent men, engaged in their own calling. Notice what their occupation was. When Christ called them he said, “You are fishers, and you shall be fishers all your lives; but you are fishers of fish now, and I want you to be fishers of men.” He mentions their vocation, and the work he is going to give them. O my brethren and sisters, if you are saved I pray that Jesus may give you that second call, so that you may be earnest “fishers of men!”

There is a great deal in that sentence, “fishers of men,” a very great deal more than we can bring out now. A fisherman, you know, must be acquainted with the sea. Peter knew the Lake of Galilee; I dare say there was not a creek or an inlet in it with which he was not acquainted; he knew the deep places where some kinds of fish were to be found, and the shallow places where others could be caught. And so if you would serve Christ you must know a good deal about men; you must study human nature, and you must watch your opportunities of doing good. You know there are some places where you can meet with more sinners than in others, and there is a certain way of dealing with one disposition, and quite another way of dealing with another. If you are to be a “fisher of men,” you must take good stock of the neighbourhood where you live. If you would be a “fisher of men” in the Tabernacle, I hope you will know the people near whom you sit, for as you know them, and their pursuits in daily life, and their characters and dispositions, you will be more likely to be blessed, by the help

of God's Spirit, in bringing them to a knowledge of the truth. A fisherman must be acquainted with the locality where he has to work.

A fisherman must also know how to allure the fish. I saw on Lake Como, when we visited Bellagio, some men fishing. They had torches burning in their boats, and the fish were attracted to them by the glare of the light. You must know how to get the fish together. You know there is such a thing as the ground-bait for the fishes. You must know how to allure men. The preacher does this by using images, symbols, and illustrations. You must know how to catch the fish, throwing out first, perhaps, not a remark directly to the point, because that might be unwise, but a side way remark, which shall lead to another, and yet another. If you are to be a "fisher of men" you will want your wits about you. It will not do to blunder over men's souls. Fish are not caught by every boy who chooses to take a pin and a piece of cotton and make his way to the pond. Fish want a fisherman, and there is a sort of congruity between the fish and the man who catches them. I do not wonder that Izaak Walton could catch fish. He seems to have been born and made on purpose for it, and so there are some men who are made on purpose for winning souls. They naturally care for their fellows, and they have such a way of putting the truth, that as soon as they speak men say, "Here is a man come who knows all about me, and knows how to deal with me," and they at once yield to his influence. Oh that I had hundreds of such in this church! I have a good share of them, and I bless God every time I remember them. God has called them, and has made them true fishers of men; they know about men, and also how to allure them.

The fisherman must be a man who can wait with patience. Oh the patience of a fisherman! "We have toiled all night," said the disciples, "and have taken nothing." You cannot be a fisherman unless you are willing to sit and watch, especially if

you angle. There you may sit for hours and hours together, and at last when the float begins to move you think you have got your fish, but probably it is only a weed or a frog, and you may watch, and watch, and watch again, and nothing will come of it. Ah! but it is harder work still to wait in Christ's service, to preach twenty times and have no conversions, perhaps to go on teaching in a Sunday school and to see no heart-breaking work done, no sinners crying "What must I do to be saved?" but to have to go to your knees and say, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" You will want something within to help you to wait thus; you will want the Holy Spirit of grace himself dwelling in you to supply you with divine patience, or else you will throw up your work, give away your nets, and say, "I will do something that pays me better than this."

A fisherman, too, is one who must run hazards. Especially was this so on the Lake of Galilee, for that, like many other lakes, was subject to fierce storms. The winds sometimes came rushing down from the mountains, and before the fisherman could take in his sail his boat would be upset. And truly every worker for Christ must expect squalls and stormy weather. Do not think, dear friends, to serve Jesus Christ in those kid gloves and in that nice dainty style of yours. That is not the way in which fish are caught out at sea; it is rough work, and requires a man who can let the wind howl about him without being afraid of his fine curls, or of having the perfume taken out of them. It needs a man that has a bold face and a brave heart, and who when the storm comes looks up to the God of Storms, and feels that he is on his Master's service, and may therefore count upon his Master's protection. May the Lord call many members of this church to such work as this, and when the Master shall drag home our net full of big fishes, we shall have a rich reward for all the toils of Christian labour.

The fisherman, once again, must be one who has learned

both how to persevere and how to expect. The fisherman goes on, and on, and on, and fishes, not sometimes but continually. As Christ's good sower must take the precept, "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand," so also must his fisherman. "We have toiled all night and taken nothing; nevertheless, at thy command we will let down the net." But I said he must also learn to expect. He must have twinkling in his soul, like a bright particular star, the hope that he shall drag his net to land full of fishes at the last. Beloved, we shall not labour in vain; we shall not spend our strength for nought. We may not live to see the result of the truth which we proclaim, but

***"The precious seed shall ne'er be lost,
For grace ensures the crop."***

We must learn to believe in the indestructibility of every truthful testimony, in the immortality of every good deed, in the resurrection of every buried word to live in the sight of God. We must

"learn to labour and to wait."

There are three words, which have been running in my mind for the last few days, and have seemed to work themselves into me, and I hope I may long keep them. One word is Work, another is Wait, and the other is Pray. Work, work, work! Wait, wait, wait! Pray, pray, pray! I think that these three words will enable a man to be, under God, a true and successful fisher of men.

I have thus described the sort of men who were called, and the work, which Christ gave them to do over and above the work in which they were engaged.

I now want you to notice the prompt obedience of Peter to this call.

I wonder how it was that Peter came directly Christ said,

“Follow me.” We know that Peter was a disciple, and consequently, his heart was ready to receive the word, which called him to be a servant. It is of no use for me to call some of you to follow Christ, and work for him as “fishers of men;” for if you were to obey, you could not do it acceptably, because you are not the children of God. But you who are saved have something in your hearts that will echo to the exhortation, “Follow me;” so that methinks you need only to have a good work set fairly before you, and to know what it is that the Master requires of you, and you will say at once, “Lord, I will do it,” for

***“’Tis love that makes our cheerful feet
In swift obedience move.”***

When the heart loves Christ, then the path of duty, which before was rough and rugged, becomes straight and smooth, if not flowery, and the soul says, —

***“Help me to run in thy commands,
’Tis a delightful road;
Nor let my heart, nor feet, nor hands,
Offend against my God.”***

Beloved friend, very much of the excellence of our service to Christ will depend upon the instantaneous way in which we do it when we know it to be a duty. I believe that debating with one’s-self about duty is a very dangerous thing. David said, “I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.” Peter did not say, “Lord, let me stop and dry these nets, and hang them up, and bring the boat to shore, and then cast anchor and leave it right,” nor did James and John say, “Master, let us go home and kiss that dear mother of ours, and let us see that Zebedee has somebody to take our place;” but immediately they left their nets, and followed Christ. May I urge upon you the habit of falling into the line of duty instantly. When

soldiers are being drilled I like to see the way in which the word of command is obeyed the instant it is given. "Right about face!" and the whole line turns right about at once. The thing is done, we say, mechanically. It should be so with us. But I know how it is; we get a right good thought of something we ought to do, but we stop and say, "Now, shall I do it, and when shall I do it?" and for the first hour or two we mean to do it, but by the next day we think it possible that we will decline it, and perhaps when a week is over we give it up altogether. I believe that this is so with many, many Christians in the matter of believers' baptism: to give one instance out of many, they say, "Well, I used to think of it when I was young, and I then believed it was my duty, and I think it is my duty now, if I really came to consult the Word of God about it, but I have put it off so long; well, perhaps I may see to it one of these days," while there is another and far more likely "perhaps," namely, that having procrastinated so long over that one duty, they will suffer it to go by default. Do not toy with Christian service, brethren. There would have been more earnest Whitefields in the world, more Wesleys, more devoted Brainerds and Martyns, if men obeyed the call of God instead of taking counsel of flesh and blood, and considering this, that, and the other, and then resolving not to obey. Remember, it is possible for us to have grace in the heart, and yet to be disobedient. We have many such mournful specimens. We cannot but hope that they will enter heaven, for they are washed in the precious blood, and clothed in the Saviour's righteousness, but they do little, if anything, for Christ, because they have tampered with his calls, they have violated convictions, and have started back from duties in the exercise of their unbelief, instead of pressing forward in the glory and the majesty of a simple faith in Christ Jesus. If you feel that you have anything to do, do it directly. If God calls you to preach before you go home, do it in the street, I pray you, and if there is anything which claims your

immediate attention, if there is a poor person you ought to relieve, if there is anyone to whom you ought to speak before leaving this place, I beseech you do not trifle with the conviction, but us faithful servants of Jesus Christ, being saved, and professing to love him, I pray you, instantly, to do whatever you feel you ought to do for him. I have heard of the question being asked in a school, what was the meaning of the text. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." One said, it meant that it should be done truthfully; and another, that it should be done unanimously; but a third said, it meant, that it should be done without asking any questions, and the answer was a good one, for we who do know and love Christ, should be willing to do his will without asking any questions.

I must not, however, keep you much longer. I will notice, lastly, that when the call came to Peter in the shape of "Follow me," it must have suggested to him many thoughts; for it contained, in addition to mere service, privilege as well as duty. There was a book written not many years ago, by an excellent divine, to which I cannot quite subscribe, I mean Dr. Bushnell's "Higher Life." I cannot subscribe to all that is in it, but I believe that there is a period in the life of some Christians when they rise to a platform elevated above ordinary Christianity, almost as much as ordinary Christianity is elevated above the world. I think that in addition to the first call by which we are brought out of nature's darkness into God's marvellous light, there does come to the Christian, when the Spirit of God works mightily with him, another call by which he is brought into greater familiarity with the Lord Jesus, taught more of conformity to him in his sufferings, and made to be more fully a partaker of the height, and depth, and breadth, and length, of that love which passeth all understanding. Such a call seems to me to be imaged in this call of Peter. Have you been living, my dear sister, at a distance from Christ? Have you been obliged to sing the hymn —

*“Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought —
‘Do I love the Lord, or no?
Am I his, or am I not?’”*

I do pray for you, as one of the greatest privileges I could ask God for on your behalf, that Christ may come to you afresh now, and be formed in your heart anew, the hope of glory, in such a way that you may follow him into close practical fellowship, and earnest unstaggering faith. Believe me, it is life to believe in Christ however little, but it is life in health and vigour to believe in Christ with a faith that does not blench [recoil]. To have Christ and not to see him is salvation, but to have him and to see him is salvation rapturously enjoyed. To be saved and not to know it, is a small privilege, but to be saved and to know it, nay, to know him who is the resurrection and the life, and to sit with him, and sup with him, and to feel that his shadow yields a great delight, and that his fruit is sweet unto one’s taste, this is a way of living which angels might almost envy the favoured men who possess it. May the Master call you in that sense now! Pray that prayer which Watts has put into rhyme: —

*“Draw me away from flesh and sense,
One sovereign word shall draw me thence;
I would obey the voice divine, And all inferior joys resign.”*

May you get a call from the Master, “Follow me unto the Mount of Transfiguration to see my glory, and share in it, and abide with me in sacred, rapt, secret fellowship which the world knoweth nothing of.”

But this was not merely a call to fellowship, but to practical fellowship. It seemed to say, “Peter, put down thy net, and take up the cross; I am to be despised, come and be despised with me; I am going without the camp, I shall be scorned, and cast out from society; come, Peter, come without the camp with

me.” Oh may Christ give you such a call as that! You are saved, but still to a great extent you are in the world. Oh that you might have a separating call — “Come ye out from among them; be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing.” May you feel now as if you had got a new life over and above the life you have already; that you have fresh blood poured into the veins of your piety, that you might rise to something better. Come out and avow your Master; avow him by nonconformity to the world in all respects.

To conclude. When Christ said, “Follow me,” did he not mean that Peter was to follow him in everything and in all things? May the Master call you and me to follow him in that consecration to his Father’s will, which made him say — “My meat and my drink is to do the will of him that sent me.” Oh! there are so many of you professors, whose meat and drink are found in trade, or the making of money, or the reading of books, or the study of this and of that. May he call you to make himself the first thing, to make his honour your grand object, and to make his church your true mistress, the lady of your heart reigning in your spirit. Oh! to be wholly given up to Christ, to be a sacrifice upon the altar, smoking, burning, utterly consumed, a living sacrifice, which is your most reasonable service. No, you need not shut up shop; oh no! but you will go and make money for Christ, and give it to his cause. No, you need not give up your daily labour, but you will be a priest unto God, even while you are wearing the garments of your trade. No, you must not dare to think of such a thing as withdrawing from your present position, and your little ones round about you, but you must keep where you are, and glorify Christ there, feeling now that you have been called to the work of God, but that that service is to be done just where you are; that you are not to be stargazing and looking aloft for some great thing, but to stand and do a day’s work in a day, in the sphere where Providence has called you, and where grace has

blessed you.

Now, you see, I have put all this on the right footing. I have told none of you to serve Christ till you are saved, but when you are saved, I hope and pray that you and I may see Christ calling on us to be “fishers of men.” May the Lord call some who have never been called at all. May it come to pass that this very evening some may look to the Lamb of God, dying, bleeding, and suffering. Sinner, he is the Sin-bearer. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. That face was marred with sorrow, and there must you find your hope. Look to him. That bleeding man is also the immortal God; trust him, and you are saved. That one act of trust is the means of eternal salvation to everyone that exercises it. Then, being saved, may Christ call you, fishermen or whatever you may be, to serve him until he cometh to take you unto himself.

*“Teach me, my God and King,
In all things thee to see;
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for thee!*

*All may of thee partake;
Nothing so small can be,
But draws when acted for thy sake,
Greatness and worth from thee.*

*If done beneath thy laws,
E’en servile labours shine;
Hallowed is toil, if this the cause,
The meanest work divine.”*

