

HIS TOUCH HAS STILL ITS ANCIENT POWER

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN -

WHICH SHALL PROSPER?

"In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good"
(Ecclesiastes 11:6)

IN LONDON RECENTLY a well-known preacher said to me: "Personally, I haven't much faith in these big campaigns, because the results are so short-lived. Large numbers of people profess conversion, but as soon as the mission ends the majority of them are never seen again."

Now, we must admit that there is a great deal of truth in what my friend said, so let us face the facts bravely. Here I wish to speak with the utmost emphasis. If there is one thing above another which my soul abominates, it is introducing high-pressure salesmanship methods into evangelistic work. There has been too much of this in the past twenty years, and often the aftermath has been so tragic that many thoughtful people have almost lost faith in evangelism of any kind. Thank GOD, recently the use of these methods has been decidedly decreasing.

It is comparatively easy, by using undue pressure, psychological guile, excessive emotionalism, and embarrassing tricks, to induce people in a crowd to raise the hand, walk to the front, or sign a decision form. On making inquiries, we have been surprised at the number of simple people who, attending such meetings, imagine that this sort of thing is conversion. These folk, often without any real work of grace in their hearts, make an honest endeavour to reform, only to discover that their "conversion" just doesn't work.

You will remember that the Lord reminded us of the danger of a negative reformation in His parable of the unclean spirit. **"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there."**

When that unclean spirit returned to the reformed man, he found the life **"swept and garnished."** That is, the evil removed and furnished with good works, but the heart was empty, no one was in occupation. CHRIST had not taken possession by His Spirit. We know from experience that what the MASTER said about such a man is all too true: **"The last state of that man is worse than the first"** (Matthew 12:43-45).

The appalling ignorance of the fundamental facts of the Christian faith amongst our generation demands, that those of us who preach the Gospel of grace should not only seek to win the heart, but also instruct the mind. Our prayers, preaching, and methods of appeal should all be directed to this one end, that the number of false professions of which we have spoken, should be reduced to a minimum.

Despite what I have just said about "decision forms" and "shaking hands with the preacher," I certainly believe that these things, though sometimes abused, can nevertheless be wisely used as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The New Testament teaches clearly that those who turn to CHRIST should immediately confess Him publicly: But surely such confession of CHRIST should only follow, never precede, conversion, for what advantage is the outward and visible sign if there be no inward and spiritual grace?

For some years now, toward the close of each campaign, I have given opportunity to those who have found CHRIST during the meetings to make public confession of their faith in Him, by coming forward during the singing of a hymn to stand with me at the Communion table. Scores have testified to blessing received in their own hearts following this simple confession, not to mention the untold joy or conviction it has brought to many another who was present.

A brilliant young woman, a member of the university of the city where I was preaching, attended the services and heard the call, "Come, follow!" Night by night she saw others, including some of her closest friends, make their way down the aisles of the big church, of which she was a member, confessing CHRIST as Lord. Each night, with a heavy heart, she returned to the quiet of her own room and prayed: "Oh, GOD, I want to become a Christian, but I can't, for if I did You might ask me to go forward and confess You, and I couldn't do it - not here in this city where I am so well known; and am I not already a church member? Don't my friends already look upon me as a Christian? and isn't my own father a minister?"

It was almost the closing night of the series, and as she returned from the church to her lodgings, her burden seemed so heavy that she cried to the Lord to send help - and help came that very night. She finished her supper and went into the sitting-room and sat down at the piano. Here she could be alone. The hymn book was open in front of her, and if she had heard the voice of CHRIST it would not have been clearer, for there printed over the words of a hymn she read: **"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh"** (Mark 8:38)

"Ashamed of Me?" Ashamed of CHRIST! The words went home. She knelt there at the piano stool and prayed: "Dear Lord, forgive my sinful pride; that I should be ashamed of Thee!

"Ashamed to be a Christian!
My guilty fear, depart!
I will not heed the tempter
That whispers to my heart.
Dear SAVIOUR! though unworthy,
Yet this my only plea

Thy all-atoning merit:
For Thou hast died for me."

"O, Lord, by Thy grace I will both trust Thee and confess Thee! Amen."

The following night that young woman, knowing what she was doing and why she was doing it, stepped forward during the singing of the last hymn. Others, who had been hesitating for fear of what she would think, immediately joined her. In the position of influence she occupies to-day, she is still not ashamed to own her Lord.

But no matter what method is used or how cautious the preacher may be, there will always be those who fall away.

The Apostle Paul said: "**All men forsook me**" (II Timothy 4:16).

Even during the Master's ministry, "**Many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him**" (John 6:66).

Doubtless the evangelist or the pastor is often to blame, but if we understand the Parable of the Sower aright, perhaps more often it is the fault of the shallow, emotional, or worldly nature of the individual hearer. Neither the sower nor the seed are blamed - but the soil, and - solemn thought - out of the four kinds of soil, only one was good and honest and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

But enough of these lamentations. Shall the farmer cease to sow seed because every grain does not germinate? Shall we cease to evangelize because some converts backslide? Did I hear D. L. Moody say, "No, no, a thousand times, no"!

~ end of chapter 11 ~
