

"I WILL MAKE YOU TO BECOME FISHERS OF ME" (MARK 1: 17)

In John 21: 1-15 we read that Peter went fishing, and that though he toiled the whole night he caught no fish at all. Then the risen Lord appeared to him and asked him whether they had any food; but the answer was in the negative. Then the Lord told Peter to cast the net on the right side. As he obeyed the Lord the net was found to be full of fishes. They were brought to the shore safely, where they were roasted on the fire. The Lord said: "Bring of the fish which ye have now caught". This narrative can be used to illustrate various stages through which saints after salvation pass, before they are brought to that stage of spiritual maturity in which they will be of value in the service of the Lord. Let us look at these spiritual stages.

FISHES IN THE SEA

Peter, Thomas and some other disciples went for fishing in the sea of Tiberias (John 21: 1). The fishes in the sea are typical of sinners in the world. This was exactly our condition before we were saved. Paul says: "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world... Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind"(Eph.2: 2-3). What was true of the Christians in Ephesus before their salvation is true of every Christian before conversion. The fishes drank the water of the sea, and ate the small insects and herbs in the sea. This was also our condition before salvation. We drank the filth of the world, and ate the weeds of fleshly desires. Many fishes are found in the deep waters, and in the same way many of us were once right out in the depths of sin.

FISHES IN THE NET

"And he said unto them, Cast the net on the, right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes" (v.6). "...our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal.1 :3,4). In the seven parables of the Kingdom of Heaven, the last one is the parable of a net (Matt. 13:47). This net in the parable is the net of evangelism, and the casting of the net in the sea refers to world-wide evangelism (Matt.28:19-20). Now let us return to our story. In his profession of fishing, Peter trusted in his own experience and human wisdom when he cast the net, but the result was an empty net, disappointment and failure. Then he obeyed the Lord, and the net was found full of fishes. It is not our experience or cleverness which will bring souls into the net cast by preaching, but our obedience to the Word of the Lord. When casting the net of evangelism we must preach the message of the cross like Paul: "For determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor.2:2). "Christ, Who gave himself...that he might deliver us from this...world"(Gal.1: 3, 4). It was the message of the cross, which delivered us from the evil world, and it is as you allow the cross to work in your daily life, that you will experience day-to-day deliverance from the world.

FISHES BROUGHT TO THE LORD

"And the other disciples came in a little ship; ...dragging the net with fishes...they were come to land" (John 21:8, 9). "...ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world" (John 15:19). Now we see that the fishes, after they were caught in the net, were dragged right to the shore. Here is an illustration of God's purpose of complete separation from the world. "I have chosen you out of the world". The children of Israel were first delivered from Egypt, and then they went through the Red Sea: and were completely separated from Egypt. Deliverance and separation go together; you cannot separate them; they are interlinked. Once I was in Berhampur for special meetings, and I saw a number of fishermen dragging a net to the shore. Due to their negligence and the weakness of the net, some of the fishes jumped out into the pond. How often due to the negligence of the preachers, and their weak presentation of the Gospel message, people who appeared to have been secured in the Gospel net, have slipped back into the world! Then there is another side. If the fishes, after they are caught in the net are kept very near the shore, they will jump back into the sea if they get a chance. Some people are like that. Take for example, the case of Lot. First he pitched his tent toward Sodom (Gen.13:12}. A little later you find him right in Sodom (Gen.19:1}. Demas was a fellow-worker of Paul, but he was again attracted by the world, and slipped back into it (2Tim.4: 10). If the Lord has delivered you from the wicked world of sin, keep yourself far away from the temptations of the world and live a life of complete separation from its vanities.

FISHES ON FIRE

"As soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread" (John 21: 9). First the fishes were in the sea, then in the net, next on the shore, and finally on the fire. Similarly we were once in the world. Then the Lord delivered us from the world, to live a life of full separation from its ways. But He also wants us to be prepared to go through fire, so that we may be ready and able to feed the people of God.

THE FIRE OF SUFFERING

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet.1: 7). "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings" (1 Pet.4: 12, 13). In these passages reference is made to the fire of suffering. You must be prepared to go through suffering, hardship, difficulties and painful experiences. Perhaps you may be persecuted, tortured, badly treated and evil spoken of. You may go through sickness, poverty and calamity. You may experience tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or jail, or danger to life. But the Lord will use such things as fire to test and mature you. It is fire, which takes away the dross from the gold, and makes it pure, solid, shining and precious. It is fire, which makes the earthen vessel strong for use. It is the heat of the sun, which takes away the rawness, hardness, and sourness of fruit, and makes it juicy, sweet, ripe, and eatable. Other things, like fishes, we have to put in the fire, so that they may be made fit for food. How many times God's people murmur and grumble when they go through suffering! How many times saints are disheartened and

discouraged and dismayed when they face hardship! How many of us are confused, perplexed and disturbed when we are permitted to go through sickness and poverty! How many times some of us reason with God and question His faithfulness and Almighty power when we are tortured and persecuted! How many have backslidden under painful experiences! If under difficulty, suffering or persecution, you have murmured, or have been discouraged or perplexed, or have reasoned, doubted and gone astray, you can ask the Lord's forgiveness, and He will forgive and cleanse you, but He will not spare you the fire. "Passing through the fire you will not be burned", but He will bring you to a "wealthy place". Taking you through the fire like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, He will burn all the various kinds of cords, which are binding your spiritual life, and will enable you to enjoy full liberty as sons of God. Yes, through that very fire He will bring you to maturity and readiness to fulfill all His purposes. God's ways are strange but wonderful.

We have seen from John 21: 1-15 that through the net of the Gospel preaching, we sinners were brought out of the world to live a life of total separation from its ways. Then we are taken through the fire of suffering to be able to feed the people of God. The next fire is,

THE FIRE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

"And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:3, 4). "...Who maketh his...ministers a flame of fire" (Heb.1: 7).

We know that fire is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit plays a major and an important part in the spiritual growth of the saints, and God wants His servants themselves to become flames of fire. It means that the power of the Holy Spirit, like fire, must be manifested in the life and ministry of His servants. When God's ministers become flames of fire, and the power of the Holy Ghost, like fire, is released through them, their ministry brings cleansing and warmth in the lives of those who listen, and God uses it for their spiritual growth.

John Sung, the well-known Chinese evangelist, was called "Flame", because of the power of the Holy Ghost manifested in his ministry, which brought awakening and revival in many countries of South East Asia. Alas! Many times the ministry of God's servants is not in the power of the Holy Ghost. As a result, it only increases the Bible knowledge of God's children, without touching their spiritual inward life. That is why, even after many years of ministry, there is no growth or maturity evident in the saints. On the other hand, many believers do not allow the Spirit of God to work in their lives even though the Word is presented in the power of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord remove both these defects and raise up ministers who will become "flames of fire", -presenting the Word in the power of the Holy Ghost; and may He also prepare the hearts of the hearers to receive that ministry which is released in the power and fire of the Holy Ghost. Such ministry will bring spiritual growth and maturity among the believers.

BRINGING THE FISHES TO THE LORD

"Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught" (John 21: 5, 10).

The Lord asked His disciples if they had any food to give Him, but they had nothing. How many believers are there who are full of anger, wrath, bitterness, jealousy, strife and evil -speaking! Can such things satisfy the Lord? How many believers, husbands and wives, quarrel among themselves, and have no peace at home! Can this give satisfaction to the Lord? How many believers are unfaithful to the Word of God in their business, and make money by unscriptural dealings! They have nothing that can give satisfaction to the Lord. How many carnal Christians have fleshly desires! The Lord does not get any pleasure from their lives. How many saints live inconsistent lives in their schools, colleges, hospitals and offices, and do things, which are not pleasing to the Lord! Many servants of God labor hard in serving Him, like Peter toiling the whole night. But they serve the Lord with fleshly zeal, and not in the power of the Holy Spirit, nor in the perfect will of God and hence give no satisfaction to Him. The Lord is asking you the same question that He asked His disciples, "Children, have ye any meat?" If the Lord shows you your weaknesses, shortcomings, failures and sins, confess them frankly, immediately and fully, "O Lord! I have failed Thee in many matters. My walk, talk, family life, business life, behavior in school or college, have not given Thee full satisfaction". He will then cleanse you, and if you are prepared to go through the different experiences, of fire, your life and ministry will be such as can satisfy the Lord.

FISH FOR THE LORD

"As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught" (John 21: 9, 10). Oh dear brothers and sisters, it is only those believers who have been through the fires of suffering and cleansing by the Holy Ghost that can fully satisfy the Lord. Isaiah prophesied concerning the Lord: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" - (Isa.53: 11).

FISH FOR THE DISCIPLES

"Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise"(John 21: 13). First of all, our lives and ministry should- satisfy the longing heart of the Lord. Then it should satisfy the believers. How often the lives and ministry of God's servants do not satisfy the saints! Paul said to the elders of the church in Ephesus, "...feed the church of God" (Acts 20:28).The fish was first roasted, then the Lord took them and gave them to the disciples for the satisfaction of their hunger. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled"(Matt.5: 6). Like the roasted fish you should first be made fit by the hands of God to feed His people. Then, even as the fish was taken, broken and distributed by the Lord, so must you yield yourself completely into His hands, so that He can use you to feed His people. Then they will be satisfied and edified through your yielded life and ministry.

FISH FOR THE MULTITUDES

"...and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost" (John 6: 11, 12). First you see the fish satisfying the Lord, then satisfying the disciples, and finally satisfying the hunger of the multitudes. May the Lord lead you through the experiences of deliverance, separation and fire, and make your life and

ministry satisfying to the Lord to feed His people, and also become a means of bringing true satisfaction to many perishing souls.

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