

## **How to Win Souls by M Denton**

I have been greatly interested in that wonderful work by Spurgeon, 'Winning Souls;' and I wish to make a few remarks on that subject.

'To win souls for Christ is the noblest work in which a human being can be engaged on earth. Having been saved ourselves, we ought to seek to save others. This religion in earnest is a moral power, and gives an influence which nothing else can possibly bestow. If we live near to Christ and walk in the light as He is in the light, and love Him with all our souls, and obey Him in all things, we shall be much blessed ourselves and be made a great blessing to others; we shall have power with God, and having this, we shall prevail with men. In the Book of Proverbs we are told that 'He that winneth souls is wise.' 'Winneth' has a variety of meanings; it may be applied to the fisherman's craft. How carefully Bacon describes the fisherman's life.

'You see the ways the fishermen doth take  
To catch the fish; what engines doth he make!  
Behold ! how he engages all his wits,  
Also his snares, lines, angles, hooks and nets;  
Yet fish there be, that neither hook nor line:  
Nor snare, nor net nor engine, can make thine:  
They must be groped for, and be tackled too;  
Or they will not be caught whate'er you do.'

We must be equally careful and thorough in fishing for souls. The best means for bringing souls to Christ is the preaching of the Gospel. This is the chief method which God has appointed for bringing sinners to Himself.

The fisherman, to be successful, must be skilful. Washington Irving tells us of three men who had read Izaak Walton on 'The Pleasure of Fishing,' and they wished to enter upon the same amusement. They bought the best rods and lines that could be purchased, so that they might catch the fish at once. They fished and fished the live-long day, but caught nothing. They were getting disgusted with the 'sport' that had no sport in it, when a ragged boy came down from the hills without shoes or stockings. He had only a bit of a bough pulled from a tree, a piece of string and a bent pin for fishing tackle; putting a worm on the pin, he threw it in the water, and out came a fish directly. In again went the line and out came another fish, till his basket was quite full. They asked him how he did it. 'Ah!' said the boy, 'he could not tell them that, but it was easy enough when you had the way of it.' Much in the same was it in fishing for men.

Some preachers who have silk lines and fine rods preach eloquently and exceedingly gracefully, but never win souls. Ethical preaching, literary preaching, critical preaching have had a long trial, and the results have not been wholly satisfying. No man can really succeed in winning souls unless he is for this purpose absolutely at the disposal of Jesus Christ. It is not fine preaching that is wanted; no, preaching is potent for good only in so far as it is accompanied with personal testimony. The religion of the future will be founded on personal revelation, with personal experience. The only demonstrations on which the preacher will rely to convince the unbeliever, will be the demonstration of the

Spirit with power; and the strength of his argument will lie in the force of his sympathies.

To win souls the preacher must be in earnest, and attractive. The old florid style is not wanted. Plain, earnest talk suits the people. Be winsome in the pulpit. Tradesmen, to win and retain customers, study winsomeness and geniality, and so should ministers of the gospel, in order to win and retain converts to Jesus Christ. 'I pitched my reputation as a preacher into the river when I entered your town,' said a minister.

We must look for and expect conversions under the ministry of the Word. Our fathers had conversions while they were preaching. They well knew how in Apostolic times, while the Word was being preached, the Holy Spirit fell upon the people, so that they were pricked to the heart. We must have that definite expectation while preaching the Word, so that we may win souls. I well recollect how the early preachers were disappointed on a Sabbath evening if no souls were saved. The old men used to go wringing their hands, with downcast eyes, saying, No souls, no souls! Why, O Lord, why? - or they used to go away with swinging step to write in that old discoloured diary, - 'A powerful time; a time of salvation.' But now too often we have, 'Charming times,' 'Interesting services,' 'really a delightful sermon.' But, what about the results?

Miss Josephine Butler wrote an interesting account of the marvelous success which attended the earlier efforts of the Salvation Army in Switzerland. In that little volume she discloses the reason why the humble messengers of the Salvation Army often succeed, where learned and eloquent and eminent divines seem to be powerless. She rightly concludes that the real explanation of this lies in the fact that humble (and humanly speaking) ill-qualified representatives of the Salvation Army - both men and women - have at least that essential qualification, an absolute submission to the Will of Christ. It has often been noticed by careful observers that the most successful soul-winners are not always those who have attained, in their own personal life, the highest ethical level. But with all their shortcomings and infirmities, soul-winners are always those who have given themselves up to Christ for the purpose of soul-saving.

The minister who would succeed in his work in the ministry must first learn the art of getting hold of the people. Instances have been cited where Christian ministers have by the use of simple amusements induced men to come within the reach of the Gospel influences. There are always means of finding an entrance to the hearts of men who at first seem to repel all advances. Ministers must study to find out these means, and to become in reality fishers of men. We may do much good out of the pulpit as well as in it. Souls may be won by pastoral visitation as well as by pulpit ministration. A woman begged her minister to talk with her husband, a stolid worldly farmer.

'What is he interested in?' asked the minister.

'Nothing but his cattle and his fiddle.'

The minister called at his house and talked with him about his cattle, and by-and-by the conversation turned on the fiddle. It was found that the minister could

draw a bow, and after trying the instrument he; told the farmer that he thought he had a better one at his house, and invited him to come and use it. He came and tried the fiddle; and the upshot of it was, that the minister fiddled him into the church, and led him to the Lord.

One of the best means for bringing sinners to find their Saviour is by the minister getting to know the families of the people at their homes. 'A house-going parson makes a church-going people.' Mr. Garrett's advice to Christian workers is to live amongst the people we wish to save. It is sometimes said that the pulpit is losing its hold of the people. This may be true in some cases. If the minister's sermons have nothing in common with the experiences of the people - their struggles, temptations, sorrows, and the mysterious complexity of their daily life, such a preacher will have little power among his hearers. A minister must visit his flock, so that his preaching may be fruitful of spiritual results.

We want men like the late Mr. Jones, to visit and go among the people. Some years ago Mr. Jones was employed in Hull as a town missionary, and was remarkably successful in winning souls. The people flocked to hear him in crowds; not so much for his pulpit eloquence as for his humble disposition. He was one of the chief factors in building up West Street Chapel, and sinners were drawn to the Saviour by his tender appeals to the conscience and the heart. His singing of the Gospel hymns was also a special attraction. He preached the gospel of love and the people loved him. He was a man of prayer; he preached for souls. Again, we want men like the late Rev. Parkinson Milson. His ministry was wonderfully successful. There were conversions Sabbath after Sabbath. This man had a passion for souls. Soul-winning was his definite aim. He had the burden of souls resting on him. I knew him when he first commenced his ministerial life as a young man in Hull. I well recollect how disappointed he was when he came home from the Sunday night prayer-meeting if there were no souls saved. Some might have thought this Yorkshire preacher a diamond in the rough; but he was a diamond of rare quality.

Primitive Methodism need never fear so long as her pulpits are filled by such preachers. They may be unpolished and at times a wee bit long-winded, but they know their Bibles, and they know human nature. They can speak to the heart and stir its deepest feelings. They put bread in their sermons and feed the flock of God. We are in danger of yielding too much to it fastidious literary appetite. Unshapely cakes, however, are better than polished stones for hungry people any day. Long may our people have wisdom and grace to appreciate such noble workers.

The common people who crowd our public houses and theatres, and who neglect churches and chapels, will only be induced to come to us when our services are short and cheerful. Surely it is worth our while to ask 'How can we attract the people to our large chapels?' If we cannot preach to them inside the places of worship we cannot outside. But the churches have not yet studied sufficiently the art of attracting the people. They need to take a leaf out of the book of publicans and music-hall proprietors, whose traps are laid with unerring and fatal skill.

We have not to wait until the people enter the church; but we must go out and compel them to come in. Fishers of men will not be content with merely casting their nets. They will want to learn when and where to cast them to the greatest advantage; and in order to do this, this acquaintance must be gained with the habits and characters of the people. To catch fish we must follow them; and so must we do if we wish to catch men. 'The enthusiasm of humanity' one writer calls this power of influencing others. Paul points to the true and only source of this power when he says, 'The love of Christ constraineth me.'