

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

AN ENCOURAGING LESSON FROM PAUL'S CONVERSION.

A Sermon

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“Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.”—Acts ix. 13–16.

THE conversion of Saul of Tarsus was one of the most remarkable facts in Christian history. Perhaps there has never happened an event of equal importance since the days of Pentecost. It was important as a testimony to the power and truth of the gospel. When such a man, so violently opposed, so intelligent and well-instructed, could be converted to the faith of the Nazarene, by the appearance of the Lord from heaven, it was a testimony alike to the fact of our Lord's resurrection, and to the power of his word. Paul also occupied a high place among the defenders of the faith when the gospel had to struggle for a footing against Judaism and philosophy. Being well versed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and in the traditions of the Jews, and possessing great argumentative powers, he became a leading apologist for the faith, and in the synagogues and the schools, overthrew those who opposed the doctrines of Jesus. In addition to this, the conversion of the apostle Paul gave a great impetus to the missionary spirit of the Christian church. Here he shone pre-eminently. Into what lands did he not carry the gospel? Ordained to be the apostle of the uncircumcision, he proclaimed in the utmost ends of the earth the name of Jesus Christ. The apostle, moreover, as a writer takes the highest place in the Christian canon. It pleased God to select this most remarkable man to be the medium of inspiration by whose writings we should receive the most thorough and complete exhibition of the gospel of the grace of God. Turn to the New Testament, and see with astonishment how large a space is occupied by the let-

ters of one first called Saul of Tarsus, but afterwards Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ. It is a matter of fact that Paul not only directed the energy of the Christian church of his own day, but shaped its mode of action, and in addition so toned the thought of the Christian world, that to this moment I suppose he exercises, under God, a greater influence over the theology of Christendom than any other man. We claim him as the great apostle of the doctrines of grace; heading a line of teachers, among whom Augustine and Calvin stand conspicuous, he remains unrivalled as “a wise master-builder.” Even the things hard to be understood which he was not afraid to grapple with, have continued to have their effect upon Christian theology. The Pauline mark will never be erased from the page of church history. That, however, is not my business this morning. I would rather remind you that the conversion of the apostle Paul was in itself instructive. It was not only operative upon the church, but as a narrative it is instructive to us. We are not to look upon it as a strange phenomenon to be only gazed upon, and wondered at, it is a lesson-book for all time; it contains a world of teaching within it, and principally teaching upon this point—the fact of the divine interposition in the church of God. God has been pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe: this is the era of instrumentality; Christ bids his disciples go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; and it is by the communication of one earnest heart to another that men are usually converted. Such, however, was not the way by which Paul was converted. He was called into the church by an interposition of the living Christ out of heaven, speaking directly to his soul; and we doubt not that the same Jesus has still his own ways of reaching human hearts when human instrumentality is not available. Paul’s conversion is a type, or as our version reads it, a pattern, and it is natural to believe that the pattern has been copied. I shall look upon his conversion as being typical of some others that have occurred, and that will occur till the last hour of the Christian dispensation. Certain men will be brought to God not by manifest instrumentality, but more secret means. The church has reason to believe that while she industriously uses all the power committed to her, there will be interpositions of a power far higher than her own, which will work for her great successes and bring to her great additions of strength. While Barak fights below, the stars in heaven shall also fight against Sisera. That is the point I want to speak upon, this morning, for the glory of God, and the encouragement of any desponding spirits among us.

I. Our first thought shall be, this morning, THERE ARE OTHER PRODUCTIVE FORCES AT WORK FOR THE CHURCH BESIDES HER TEACHING. Her teaching is her main source of growth. She is to look to the instruction that she can give through her members, and her ministers, for the birth of most of her sons and daughters; but she is also to remember that there are other

forces at work over and above these appointed agencies; the mountain is full of horses of fire and chariots of fire round about the gospel.

And, first, let me remind you of what may be expected from *the work of the Holy Spirit* in the church of Christ. All the success of the church comes through him. That blessed person of the Divine Trinity in Unity is pleased to give power to the truth, whereby it operates upon the hearts and consciences of men. It is not to that point, however, that I draw your attention, but I would ask you a question. Have we not reason to expect that the Holy Ghost will occasionally display his power, by working apart from the ordinary agencies of the church? It is certain that the Holy Spirit can act directly upon the minds of men apart from human agency, for he has often done so in past ages. He can if so it pleaseth him, melt the stubborn heart, subdue the obdurate will, and purify the depraved affections; and though I believe he never works apart from the truth and the things of Christ, yet he can do all this while acting altogether apart from any human teaching. There have been many cases of the kind. We have heard of persons at their labour, who have not been accustomed to attend the house of God, who have not been reading religious books, and yet in the middle of their work they have been filled with penitent and devout thoughts, and have suddenly commenced an altogether new life. We have known cases of persons not engaged in lawful pursuits, but intending to perpetrate vice, who have, nevertheless, found the power of God to be greater over them than the power of their corrupt affections; they have been struck with certain reflections which they had never recognised before, have paused, and have been led to turn altogether in another direction, have, in fact, become believers in Christ and men of holy and ardent lives. Why should not the Holy Spirit do so still? If he pleaseth to employ us, it is to his honour to work by such poor instruments, but if he shall please occasionally to do without us, it is also to his honour, and I may add it is equally to our satisfaction; for we delight that he should display his power. We have reason to expect that he will so work sometimes, and this is one of the forces which may work apart from instrumentality.

Bethink you again, my brethren, of *the intercession of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. Most potent in heaven is the plea of him who here on earth offered atonement for the sins of his people. For Zion's sake he does not hold his peace, and for Jerusalem's sake he doth not rest; nor will he till his glory shall fill all the earth, and his elect bride shall share therein. Now our Lord Jesus Christ not only prays for those whom we pray for, but he prays for those we never thought of praying for. There are some whom he mentions before the eternal throne whom we have never mentioned, who have never yet been observed by any interceding Christian, whose cases have never impressed a single godly heart, yet Jesus knows them: and does he cry to God for them, and shall there not come to them grace in due sea-

son? Ay, my brethren, I rejoice in this, that where through ignorance or through the narrowness of my charity my prayer has never stretched itself, the prayer of the great High Priest who wears the Urim and Thummim can yet reach, and the salvation of God shall come to such. I doubt not Jesus might well have said to Paul, "I have prayed for thee, and therefore thou shalt be mine," and in many other cases the like is true. The intercession of our Lord is a mighty power, and as it wins gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, apostles, and preachers, and teachers, are called forth by divine grace. Not our colleges, our councils, our societies, or our conferences, but the intercession of Jesus is the mainstay of our strength, the secret cause of the calling of men into the mystery of the gospel.

Think, too, of another force, the result of which is not altogether expended in connection with manifest instrumentality; I mean *the daily and incessant intercession of the faithful in all places*. Of course, this intercession brings success to instrumentality, the work of the church would be nothing without it—true prayer is true power; but there are prayers, I doubt not, which go up to heaven, but are not offered in connection with any particular agency, and are not answered through any manifest instrumentality. There are groanings which cannot be uttered for the general cause, for the regeneration of the elect, for the glory of the Redeemer, in which we appeal directly to God, and look for him to rend the heavens and arise in his might: such prayers most probably have a reply after their own likeness. The prayers of the church come down in a great measure, as I have said, upon instrumentality, but they also drop, I doubt not, on solitary and uncultivated places. The prayers of God's church are like the clouds, which ascend from the sea, as the sun shines on the waves; they fall on the fields which have been sown by man, but they also drop upon the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side. Who shall say that Saul's conversion was not traceable to the prayer of Stephen, when, as he expired, he said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"? Yet there was no distinct connection between the two such as could be defined and described. Who shall say that the gatherings in Jerusalem for earnest prayer, may not have had about them power with God for the conversion of the persecutors, the dread of whom may have made them more earnest in supplication? Yet we do not see the same connecting link as between the famous prayer-meeting in the house of John Mark's mother, and the escape of Peter from prison. Pray on, beloved brethren, for though there should seem to be no connection between your prayers and the salvation of the sons of men, yet this shall be one of the forces in operation which shall not spend itself in vain; God will be pleased, in answer to humble and unknown pleaders, to bring out his own hidden ones.

Then remember there is another impalpable, but very potent force, *the*

aroma of the truth in the world. The truth is mainly spread by plain earnest statements of it, but there is also a savour in truth, an inherent perfume, whereby even in our silence it spreads itself. Paul declared that where he had preached the gospel he was a sweet savour of God, both in them that were saved and in them that perished. The gospel is like myrrh, and cassia, and aloes; it will make itself felt even where it is not sought after. Place some Oriental perfume in a room, and all the air will be loaded with its sweetness. Where the gospel of Jesus Christ comes, it impregnates the social atmosphere, it permeates society, it has an effect far beyond its local habitation. I do not doubt that many men who have not yet bowed before the deity of Christ, have unconsciously learnt much from him, and what they perhaps think to be their own is but a blessed plagiarism from the Jesus of Nazareth. Even the philosophies of men have been all the soberer, and the laws of men all the gentler, because of the existence of the gospel. Men cannot live in the midst of Christians, and yet altogether shut out the influence of Christianity. There is a lavender field over yonder, and though a man may hate the smell of it, and block up his windows and keep his doors closed, somehow or other, he may depend upon it, when the wind blows in the right direction, the perfume will reach him. And so it is here; if a man will not listen to the preaching of the gospel, if he constantly neglects attendance upon the means of grace, yet for all that, the kingdom of heaven has come nigh to him, and in some form or other the angel of mercy will frequently cross his path. May we not hope for results from these influences? May not these things be the thin end of the wedge which shall be driven home by divine force, until the sinner is divided from his sins? I feel sure it is so in cases numberless; for we may say of the gospel as David did of the sun, "His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof."

Further, remember there is at work in the world, wherever there are believers, *the influence of Christian life and of Christian death*, Christian life wields a mighty power. Wherever the Christian acts up to his profession, and the grace within him shines forth in holiness, those who observe him take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus; and as example speaks more loudly than precept, we may look for very marked results. The eloquence of Christian holiness is more potent for conversion than all the speaking of Christian orators—may we not therefore hope for converts by it? So, too, there are secret forces in every real Christian's death. When the ungodly man stands at the bedside, and sees a Christian die singing in holy triumph, there may not be a word addressed to him—the dying Christian may be so absorbed in heaven that he may scarce have a thought of the sinner who is looking on—but that happy death will be a potent agency to arouse, to attract, to win the heart for Christ Jesus.

Besides that, my brethren, we ought never to forget that *all the work of God in providence* is on the side of those who fight for the gospel of Jesus. I might truly say of the church that the stones of the field are in league with her, and the beasts of the field are at peace with her, for all things work her good. Sickness, when it stalketh through the land, is a powerful preacher to the unthinking masses. We have seen men impressed, in years of cholera, who despised religion before; we have marked them listening to us with attention when disease has humbled them. When death has come into the house, and the dear babe has died, it has frequently happened that ears were opened which never heard the gospel before, and hearts were impressed that were hard as iron until the fire of affliction melted them. I believe death himself to be an able ally of a faithful minister. The funerals which break men's hearts with natural sorrow are often overruled for the breaking their hearts in a spiritual sense also, so that oftentimes there are brought to Jesus, by the death of beloved ones, men who, to all human appearance, would otherwise have been lost. Have courage, ye that fight for Christ, disease and death itself shall be overruled to help you; physical calamities and catastrophes shall subdue the rebellious spirits of men, and ye then stepping in with consolation, shall find a welcome for the gospel. As God sent the hornet before his conquering Israel to overthrow the Canaanites, so doth he send providences to work together, for our help, that the truth may prevail. Providence, like the angel at the sepulchre, rolls away the stone for us. It makes straight in the desert a highway for God. It is the Elias which clears the way for the coming Saviour.

In addition to this, I must not fail to remind you that *every man has a conscience*, and though conscience is sadly impaired it still leans to the right side. Conscience is not perfect, though some assert it to be so; in common with all the faculties of man it was disarranged by the fall, and conscience is therefore no infallible judge of right and wrong; still, for all that, half blinded as it is it yet knows which is light and which is darkness, and though it puts bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter, still in the violence which it puts upon itself, it reveals an inner sense as yet undestroyed. Still is it a fact that even those who have not the law, "are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." The right awakens still an echo in man's bosom, the pure, the good, the true, still may count on recognition from the glimmering moral sense within. To the preacher this is a fact full of hope, and he ought not to forget it.

See then, that over and above our work which ought to be constant, incessant, intense, we have the Holy Spirit at work, we have Christ pleading, we have the whole company of the faithful sending up their perpetual inter-

cessions, we have the blessed savour of the truth spreading itself abroad, we have the evidence and power of holy living and triumphant dying, we have the wheels of providence revolving, and the consciences of men made to yield an acquiescence to the truth of God.

I have thus very hurriedly run over a very extensive range of consideration.

II. Secondly, reflect, my brethren, that FROM THESE SOURCES WE MAY EXPECT REMARKABLE CONVERSIONS.

We expect to see the major part of conversion through the daily instruction given to the children of Christian people, through the constant preaching of the gospel, the distribution of religious literature, and the direct efforts of the followers of Christ; but over and above all this, we have a right to expect remarkable conversions from the less manifest sources of which I have spoken. As in the case of Saul these conversions will bring to us *persons formerly violently opposed to the truth through prejudice*. In Paul we see a man opposed to Christ not because he was opposed to truth, but because he thought that Jesus was not the Messiah. He worshipped God, the God of his fathers, with a fervent heart, and because he conceived that Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be what he was not, he hunted down his disciples to the death. Once convinced that he was wrong, he followed the right at once; and we may hope that interpositions will occur in which the Holy Spirit will enlighten the darkness of men who are honest in their darkness, and that they, seeing the light, will embrace the gospel and bow before our King. Be that a subject of your prayers. I doubt not there are to be found this day, devoted to an evil cause, men who nevertheless would not wilfully choose what they knew to be error. They are devoted to it because in their ignorance they sincerely believe it to be true. Many a heretic has died for his heresy, believing it to be the very truth of God. Our prayer should be that these men who would do right if they but knew it, may receive the blessed help of him who is the light of the world, and may be brought to see in his light the true light. In such cases I should hope for their enlightenment; they are seeking goodly pearls, and I trust they will find the pearl of great price; he who has made them honest and good ground will, we trust, sow them with good seed.

We may expect, too, from these sources the conversion of *persons who have been doing much mischief to the good cause, and who are resolved to do still more*. Does not Ananias put it so? "He hath done great evil to the church at Jerusalem, and here he hath authority to bind all who call on thy name." Yes, but do not despair of a man because he is industriously opposed; do not despair of him even because he is furious. Anything is better than to slumber in indifference. Provoke a man by the gospel till he gnashes his teeth at you, and he is none the less likely to be converted; preach to

him till he saith, "He playeth well upon a goodly instrument, he maketh sweet sounds to charm my ears," you will probably lull him into everlasting destruction. I love to see men rather aroused to oppose, than made to acquiesce, because they care not whether the gospel is true or false. We may expect the Lord to arrest the chief ones among his enemies, for it will glorify him.

These sources will probably produce *converts from among those who are beyond the reach of ordinary ministries*. We sometimes regret that the voice of a thoroughly faithful ministry is seldom heard in the courts of kings, and that there is little hope of the gospel's reaching the great ones of the earth. Nay, but for all that the Lord can reach those whom we cannot reach, he can in life or in the dying hour, come to the hearts of men whose ears were never reached by any testifier to the truth, and he can bring them yet to his feet. He is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Paul would not have heard a preacher of Christ; he would have hurried him to prison, but never have listened to him; there was no likelihood of Saul's conversion by ordinary means; he would not stop to examine any documents had they been offered to him; apologists for Christ he would have rejected with scorn, but the Lord hath a way where we have none, and he calleth whom he will by his own sovereign power.

We may expect persons who shall be converted by these causes *to become very earnest*. A man who feels that God has had singular mercy upon him, feels that being much loved, and having had much forgiven, he must render much service. If I have been brought to Christ in the Sabbath-school, or after habitual listening to the truth, I am a great debtor to the mercy of God, but the probabilities are that I shall not be so much impressed with my indebtedness as I ought to be; but if I have been quite out of the way, as it were, in the wilderness of sin, and yet the voice of the Lord that breaketh the cedars of Lebanon, hath sounded in my ears, then I shall glorify that voice, and glorifying it consecrate myself to the God who uttered it.

Such men, too, *become profoundly evangelical*. I trace Paul's exceeding evangelism to the fact that he was so remarkably converted. He could not be content with the surface of truth, he dived into the depths of grace and sovereignty. He saw in himself the boundless power, the infinite mercy, the absolute sovereignty of God; and therefore he bare witness more clearly than any other to these divine attributes. He spake of election, and predestination, and the deep things of God. Who but he could have written the ninth of Romans, or the Epistle to the Galatians. Courage, then, my brethren and my sisters, the noblest minds will yet be engaged in the service of our Master. They tell us that the power of Popery spreads in the land, that everywhere men are going back to the old falsehoods from which they once were delivered; we are told that we are to be ground down again beneath

the iron wheels of superstition; and on the other hand, we hear that infidelity and scepticism spread themselves like a plague-cloud over the land. Be not afraid. God will convert the priests and convince the infidel demagogue. Ye need not fear. The leaders on the enemy's side shall yet be champions in our Master's army. Reckon not your feeble bands, count not the timid soldiers already enlisted, say not, "How few we be and how weak!" Ye know not where the Lord's hidden warriors are, nor what chief among the mighties he has concealed. They are not merely hidden among the stuff of worldliness, but they are there, in open hostility to his cross and crown: the mightiest warriors against Christ. Some of these shall through conquering grace become the servants of God. Can ye not believe it? Have ye no faith in Jesus Christ? Believing it, will ye not pray for it? Praying for it, will ye not expect it? All things are possible to him that believeth. Above all, everything is possible to the might of the eternal God and his ever-blessed Spirit.

We must say no more on that, but pass on to a third reflection.

III. THIS OCCASIONAL SINKING OF INSTRUMENTALITY ANSWERS ADMIRABLE ENDS.

It might be thought to be a dangerous thing that sometimes God should work in grace apart from man; I mean dangerous to the industry of the church, for some are always ready enough to clutch at excuses for leaving God's work alone; and there are always certain indolent spirits who would fain say, "Let God do his own work, it can be accomplished without us, we therefore may be excused." These men know better. They know the falsehood of their talk. It were not worth the Master's while to confute them, their own hearts condemn them. There are admirable reasons for the Lord's sole working; for, first, these interpositions *disclose the presence of the living Christ*. We too often forget the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet the power of the church lies in Christ. He is the wisdom of God, and the power of God. Some may remember Jesus, but not in his present personal character. In the Romish church its power over devout minds lies in no small degree in the fact that the person of Christ is much spoken of, loved, and revered; but mark well that you seldom see the Christ of the Romish church in any but two attitudes. As a rule, either he is a babe in his mother's arms, or else he is dead; scarcely ever is he set forth by them as the living King, Head, and Lord. In both of those first aspects let him be revered, let the incarnate God and the dying Saviour have your hearts; but there is another fact to be borne in mind, and that is, that he ever liveth. That church which, not forgetting his birth, nor his sacrifice, yet most clearly recognises that he still liveth, is the church that shall win the day. We must have a living Head to the church, we cannot do without one. Men will assuredly invent a living head on their own account, if they overlook the

living Christ. They will find some priest or other whom they would fain gird with the attributes of Deity, and set up as the Vicar of Christ. But we have a living Christ, and when he is pleased to appear to any man by his Spirit—I speak not of miraculous appearances, but of other direct operations of his Spirit upon the spirits of men—when he reveals himself apart from instrumentality to man, then the church discovers yet again that he is in her midst fulfilling his promise: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.” Still the Lord Jesus walketh among the golden candlesticks, and exerts a living force in the hearts and consciences of men, and he would have us remember this.

Further, dear friends, these interpositions tend to *remind the church of the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit*. The tendency nowadays is to expunge the supernatural, to bring everything down to the rule of reason, and the denial of faith; but for all that there is a Holy Spirit. Rest assured that that doctrine of the creed, “I believe in the Holy Ghost,” is a matter of reality. I am as certain that there is a Holy Ghost as that I live, for unto my spirit he has spoken, and I have come into contact with him. I know that there are men’s minds, for those minds have affected me; I know also that there is an Eternal Spirit, for he has affected my spirit, and I speak concerning him what I do know, and testify what I have seen. In proportion as that truth is made clear to the church by her personal experience, by the Spirit’s moving where he listeth, and working divine wonders, the church will be girt with power from on high.

This, too, tends to *unveil many of the divine attributes*. Men so remarkably converted are sure to display the sovereignty of God. “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion,” is an utterance which rolls like thunder over the head of Paul when he sinks amidst the blaze of the light from heaven. God is saving whom he wills, for he stops the persecutor in the maddest fury of his rage. There, too, was seen God’s power. There might have been heard as a thunderclap from heaven, “Power belongeth unto God,” when down fell Saul, wounded beneath the arrows of the Prince of Peace. There, too, was seen divine grace. Paul looked upon himself as the fairest pattern of God’s long-suffering, obtaining mercy, though he had persecuted the church of God; the very chief of sinners, and yet made not a whit behind the chief of the apostles.

And so these remarkable conversions *aid very much the faith of the church*. When she is beginning to droop and to sink, when holy men fancy that at least for awhile the cause must wither, and even the bravest spirits wait rather than press forward, then it is that these remarkable conversions come in and inspirit the whole band, and they take courage and march to the victory with willing footsteps.

And this also *startles and impresses the world*. What knows the world of the conversion of those who have sat in these pews ever since they were children? What cares the world about the faith of those who, happily for themselves, were led to Jesus from their youth? But let some gross blasphemer weep the tear of penitence, let some bold persecutor preach the faith which once he sought to destroy, and the whole city hears of it, the land is astonished, and in proportion God is glorified, and the power of his grace is manifested.

Thus, you see, there are good reasons for the Lord thus working. He may do as he wills; he will have us see that he needs us not. He may if he pleases use us, it is his rule to do so, and we are to work knowing that to be the rule; but we must adore, and admire, and bless him, that sometimes putting us aside he puts his own bare arm to the work. Thus his glorious right arm is exalted, for the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly.

IV. We shall now come to our fourth point, and draw towards a close. ALL THIS BY NO MEANS LOWERS THE VALUE OF INSTRUMENTALITY. It is not so intended, and only unwisdom would so interpret it.

For, first, *such cases are rare*, very much rarer than conversions by the agency of the church. One Saul is struck to the earth, only one; but Peter preaches at Pentecost, and three thousand are pricked in their hearts. See the difference in numbers! The preaching of the gospel is God's way of converting, his usual and general way; since "all his paths drop fatness," it is especially so with this path of the ministration of the truth by an earnest heart to other hearts. One Paul, I say, one Paul on the road to Damascus, but three thousand saved by the preaching of the word by Peter. I read of one Colonel Gardner who, on the very night he was about to commit a great sin saw, or fancied he saw, the appearance of our Lord, and heard the words, "have done all this for thee, what hast thou done for me?" There is one such case only one—I believe most certainly a true case; but there were fifty thousand perhaps in Scotland and in England at that time who were brought to a knowledge of the truth by the ordinary methods of mercy. So the exhibition of special interposing grace now and then doth not interfere with the regular work of the church, or lower our esteem of it. Riding along I see in the hedgerow a tree with rich fruit upon it, I am surprised, I do not know how it came there, it is a very unusual thing to see our garden fruit-trees in public hedgerows; but when I have seen it I do not think any the less of my neighbour who over yonder is planting fruit-trees in his orchard. That is the ordinary way to get fruit. If now and then a fruit-tree springs up upon the heath, if we are hungry we are glad to pluck the fruit—we do not know how it got there, and it is of no consequence that we should know, there is the fruit, and we are glad of it; but still we do not give up our orchard. Because sometimes a man finds a shilling, does he give up work?

Extraordinary events in nature are always treated as such, and are not made the rule of every-day action; even thus wise men treat unusual displays of divine power. To forego regular agency that we may wait for wonders, were as idle as to leave the regular pursuits of commerce to live upon the waifs washed up by the sea.

Remember, next, that *these very cases involve human agency somewhere*. Saul is on his way to Damascus, and, lo, he is struck down by the light, and by a voice from heaven is converted, but after the three days of blindness and fasting, how does he get comfort? Does that come by another voice from heaven? It might have done; but the Lord takes care that the very instrumentality which is put aside in one place shall be honoured in another, and so Ananias must be sent forth to bless the penitent. Ananias was a plain disciple—we do not know that he was either a preacher or an evangelist, but a disciple of good repute, living at Damascus, and he must come and say, “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way, hath sent me.” So you shall always find in conversion that there is instrumentality somewhere or other. My dear brother, if God is pleased to convert a soul without using you, he may honour you by employing you to comfort him after conversion. Conviction may be wrought by the Holy Spirit without means, but in the full decision, in the laying hold on Christ, he may give you occupation; *somewhere or other God will use you*; only be you a vessel fit for the Master’s use, and you will not be long out of service.

Further, so far from dishonouring instrumentality, the conversion of Saul and others of the kind is *a provision of a most remarkable instrumentality*. “I have called him”—not to be a singular article for exhibition—but “to be a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name among the Gentiles.” Remarkable converts become themselves the most indefatigable servants of God. Paul put all the wheels of the church in more rapid motion than they ever knew before, and became himself one of the greatest wheels. Everywhere goeth he preaching the gospel, so that instrumentality is not silenced, but God helpeth it to a higher position than before. Was it not through Paul that many were called into the fellowship and afterwards into the work of Jesus Christ? Should we ever have heard of such as Timothy and Titus and others if Paul had not been their spiritual parent? So that here we have not only a master worker begotten by this non-instrumental work, but he also begetteth other workers, and so the work of God to distant generations receives an impetus from the conversion of one single man. No; God does not dishonour instrumentality. If he puts it by for awhile to glorify himself, he brings it forward again in due season and makes it brighter and more fit for his purpose.

Let us adore, dear friends, in conclusion, the power of the all-working

God, let us reverence and worship him. In our gatherings as Christians, let us worship him with whom power still dwelleth. Let us not look to the earnestness of that man, or to the wealth of this, to the judgment of a third, to the eloquence of a fourth, but let us look to him who has all power in heaven and in earth, "whom having not seen we love," "in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Let us believe that the Father worketh hitherto and Christ works; let us think of him who "worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will." Let us never be dispirited, but believe that the everlasting purpose of God will be accomplished, that the success of his church will never be in jeopardy, that the onward march of the armies of God can be in no peril. All flesh shall see the salvation of God; all the earth shall worship him, and Christ shall be acknowledged to be God to the glory of God the Father; for the power to accomplish this is not contained in these poor vessels of clay, nor limited by the capacities of manhood, nor bounded by the perceptions of mortals. The arm which is on the side of the church is omnipotent, the mind that worketh over all for the glorious cause, is infinitely wise and prudent. "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your hearts, wait, I say, on the Lord." Keep ye his way; delight also yourselves in him, and he shall bring it to pass, and you shall see that accomplished which you would not have believed though a man had spoken it unto you. Go on working, there is your sphere; pray much that God would work also, for prayer is another part of your sphere. Expect God to work, believe that he will surely conquer Satan; be confident, that evil will not win the day, that error cannot be permanent, that there will occur divine surprises which will make the church to wonder at what her Lord God can do. In one word, believe and you shall be established, wait upon God and you shall be strong. Never give way to unbelief. Believe in the unseen; rest in the invisible; have confidence in the infinite; and the Lord send to us and to all Christendom a band of men whom he hath chosen—whom he shall call out as he did his apostle—and who shall become the leaders of his church, and the conquerors of the world.

The Lord grant that some who are here this morning may be among that elect company. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts ix. 1–31.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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