

THE SOUL-WINNER;

OR,

HOW TO LEAD SINNERS TO THE SAVIOUR.

BY C. H. SPURGEON

“The salvation of one soul is worth more than the framing of a Magna Charta of a thousand worlds.”—*Keble*.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

This volume is issued in accordance with a plan formed by Mr. Spurgeon; indeed, he had already prepared for the press the greater part of the material here published, and the rest of his manuscripts have been inserted after only slight revision. It was his intention to deliver to the students of the Pastors' College a short course of Lectures upon what he termed "that most royal employment"—Soul-Winning,—and, having completed the series, he purposed to collect his previous utterances to other audiences upon the same theme, and to publish the whole for the guidance of all who desired to become soul-winners, and with the hope also of inducing many more professing Christians to engage in this truly blessed service for the Saviour.

This explanation will account for the form in which the topic is treated in the present book. The first six chapters contain the College Lectures; then follow four Addresses delivered to Sunday-school teachers, open-air preachers, and friends gathered at Monday evening prayer-meetings at the Tabernacle; while the rest of the volume consists of Sermons in which the work of winning souls is earnestly commended to the attention of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For more than forty years, Mr. Spurgeon was, by his preaching and writing, one of the greatest soul-winners; and by his printed words still continues to be the means of the conversion of many all over the world. It is believed, therefore, that thousands will rejoice to read what he spoke and wrote concerning what he called "the chief business of the Christian minister."

HOW TO INDUCE OUR PEOPLE TO WIN SOULS.

I have spoken to you at different times, brethren, about the great work of our lives, which is that of winning souls. I have tried to show you various ways in which we win souls, the qualifications both towards God and towards man of those who are likely to be used in winning souls, the kind of sermons that are most likely to win souls, and also the obstacles in the way of soul-winners. Now I should like, this afternoon, to talk to you upon another part of the subject; that is,—

HOW CAN WE INDUCE OUR PEOPLE TO BECOME SOUL-WINNERS?

You are aspiring, each of you, in due time, to become pastors of churches, unless the Lord should call you to be evangelists, or missionaries to the heathen. Well, you commence at first as single sowers of the good seed of the kingdom, and you go forth scattering from your own basket your own handfuls. You desire, however, to become spiritual farmers, and to have a certain acreage which you will not sow entirely yourself, but you will have servants who will aid you in the work. Then, to one you will say, “Go,” and he will go forthwith; or, “Come,” and he will come at once; and you will seek to lead them into the art and mystery of seed-sowing, so that, after a while, you may have large numbers of persons round about you doing this good work, and thus a far greater acreage may be brought into cultivation for the great Husbandman. There are some of us who have, by God’s grace, been so richly blessed that we have all around us a large number of persons who have been spiritually quickened through our instrumentality, people who have been aroused under our ministry, who have been instructed and strengthened by us, and who are all doing good service for God.

Let me warn you not to look for all this at the first, for *it is the work of time*. Do not expect to get, in the first year of your pastorate, that result which is the reward of twenty years’ continuous toil in one place. Young men sometimes make a very great mistake in the way they talk to those who never saw them until about six weeks ago. They cannot speak with the authority of one who has been as a father among his people, having been with them for twenty or thirty years; or if they do, it becomes a sort of foolish affectation on their part, and it is equally foolish to expect the people to be all at once the same as they might be after they have been trained by a godly minister for a quarter of a century. It is true that you may go to a church where somebody else has faithfully laboured for many years, and long sown the good seed, and you may find your sphere of labour in a most blessed and prosperous state, and happy will you be if you can thus jump into a good man’s shoes, and follow the path he has been treading. It is always a good sign when the horses do not know that they have a new driver;

and you, my brother, inexperienced as you are, will be a very happy man if that should be your lot; but the probability is that you will go to a place that has been allowed to run almost to ruin, possibly to one that has been altogether neglected.

Perhaps you will try to get the principal deacon to imitate your earnestness; you are at a white heat, and when you find him as cold as steel, you will be like a piece of hot iron dipped into a pail of water. He may tell you that he recollects others who were at first just as hot as you are, but they soon cooled down, and he will not be surprised if you do the same. He is a very good man, but then he is old, and you are young, and we cannot put young heads on old shoulders even if we were to attempt to do it. Perhaps next you will resolve to try some of the young people; possibly you can get on better with them; but they do not understand you, they are backward and retiring, and they soon fly off at a tangent. You must not be surprised if this is your experience. Very likely you will have almost everything to do in connection with the work; at all events, expect that it may be so, and then you will not be disappointed if it so turns out. It may be otherwise; but you will be wise if you go into the ministry expecting not to find any very great assistance from the people in the work of soul-winning. Anticipate that you will have to do it yourself, and to do it alone; and begin doing it alone, sow the seed, tramp up and down the field, always looking to the Lord of the harvest to bless your labour, and also looking forward to the time when through your efforts, under the divine blessing, instead of a plot of land that is apparently covered with nettles, or full of stones, or weeds, or thorns, or partly trodden down, you shall have a well-tilled farm in which you may sow the seed to the best advantage, and on which you shall have a little army of fellow-labourers to aid you in the service. Yet all that is the work of time.

I should certainly say to you, do not expect all this at least for some months after you settle down to work. Revivals, if they are genuine, do not always come the moment we whistle for them. Try and whistle for the wind, and see if it will come. The great rain was given in answer to Elijah's prayers; but not even then the first time he prayed, and we must pray again, and again, and again, and at last the cloud will appear, and the showers out of the cloud. Wait a while, work on, plod on, plead on, and in due time the blessing will be given, and you shall find that you have the church after your own ideal, but it will not come to you all at once. I do not think Mr. John Angell James, of Birmingham, saw much fruit to his ministry for many years. As far as I remember, Carr's Lane Chapel was not the place of any great notoriety before he preached there; but he kept on steadily preaching the gospel, and at last he drew around him a company of godly people who helped to make him the greatest power for good that Birmingham had at that time. Try to do just the same, and do not expect to see all at once what he and other faithful ministers have only been able to accomplish in many years.

In order to secure this end of gathering around you a band of Christians who

will themselves be soul-winners, I should recommend you *not to go to work according to any set rule*, for what would be right at one time might not be wise at another, and that which would be best for one place would not be so good elsewhere. Sometimes, the very best plan would be to call all the members of the church together, tell them what you would like to see, and plead earnestly with them that each one should become for God a soul-winner. Say to them, "I do not want to be your pastor simply that I may preach to you; but I long to see souls saved, and to see those who are saved seeking to win others for the Lord Jesus Christ. You know how the Pentecostal blessing was given; when the whole church met, with one accord in one place, and continued in prayer and supplication, the Holy Spirit was poured out, and thousands were converted. Cannot we get together in like manner, and all of us cry mightily to God for a blessing?" That might succeed in arousing them. Calling them together, and earnestly pleading with them about the matter, pointing out what you wish them specially to do, and to ask of God, may be like setting a light to dry fuel; but, on the other hand, nothing may come of it because of their lack of sympathy in the work of soul-saving. They may say, "It is a very nice meeting, and our pastor expects a good deal of us, and we all wish he may get it," and there it will end so far as they are concerned.

Then, if that should not succeed, God may lead you to *begin with one or two*. There is usually some "choice young man" in each congregation; and as you notice deeper spirituality in him than in the rest of the members, you might say to him, "Will you come down to my house on such-and-such an evening that we may have a little prayer together?" You can gradually increase the number to two or three, godly young men if possible, or you may begin with some gracious matron, who perhaps lives nearer to God than any of the men, and whose prayers would help you more than theirs. Having secured their sympathy, you might say to them, "Now we will try if we cannot influence the whole church; we will begin with our fellow-members before we go to the outsiders. Let us try and be ourselves always at the prayer-meetings, to set an example to the rest, and let us also arrange to have gatherings for prayer in our own houses, and seek to get our brethren and sisters to them. You, good sister, can get half-a-dozen sisters together into your house for a little meeting; and you, brother, can say to a few friends, 'Could we not meet together to pray for our pastor?'" Sometimes, the most effectual way to burn a house is to do it by pouring petroleum down the middle of it, and setting fire to it, as the ladies and gentlemen (!) did in Paris in the days of the Commune; and, sometimes, the shortest method is to light it at the four corners. I have never tried either plan; but that is what I think. I like to burn churches rather than houses, because they do not burn down, they burn up, and keep on burning when the fire is of the right sort. When a bush is nothing but a bush, it is soon consumed when it is set on fire; but when it is a bush that burns on and is not consumed, we may know that God is there. So is

it with a church that is flaming with holy zeal. Your work, brethren, is to set your church on fire somehow. You may do it by speaking to the whole of the members, or you may do it by speaking to the few choice spirits, but you must do it somehow. Have a secret society for this sacred purpose, turn yourselves into a band of celestial Fenians whose aim it is to set the whole church on fire. If you do so, the devil will not like it, and you will cause him such disquiet that he will seek the utter break up of the union, and that is just what we want; we do not desire anything but war to the knife between the church and the world and all its habits and customs. But again I say, all this will take time. I have seen some fellows run so fast at first that they have soon become like broken-winded horses, and truly that is a pitiable sight; so take time, brethren, and do not look for everything you desire to be secured all at once.

I suppose that, in most places, there is a prayer-meeting on Monday night. If you want your people as well as yourself to be soul-winners, *try and keep up the prayer-meetings all you can*. Do not be like certain ministers in the suburbs of London, who say that they cannot get the people out to a prayer-meeting and a lecture, too, so they have one week-night meeting for prayer, at which they give a short address. One lazy man said, the other day, that the week-night address was almost as bad as delivering a sermon, so he has a prayer-meeting and a lecture combined in one, and it is neither a prayer-meeting nor a lecture, it is neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red-herring; and soon he will give it up because he says it is no good, and I am sure the people think so, too. And after that, why should he not give up one of the Sunday services? The same reasoning might apply to that as to the week-night meeting. I saw, in an American paper today, the following paragraph:—"The well-known fact is again going the rounds that, in Mr. Spurgeon's church in London, the regular hearers absent themselves one Sunday evening every three months, and the house is given up to strangers. English 'boasting is excluded' in this matter. Our American Christianity is of so noble a type that hosts of our people give up their pews to strangers every Sunday night in the year." I hope it will not be so with your people, brethren, either with respect to the Sabbath services or the prayer-meetings.

If I were you, I would make that prayer-meeting a special feature of my ministry; let it be such a prayer-meeting that there is not the like of it within seven thousand miles. Do not go walking into the prayer-meeting, as so many do, to say anything or nothing that may occur to you at the moment; but do your best to make the meeting interesting to all who are there; and do not hesitate to tell good Mr. Snooks that, God helping you, he shall not pray for five-and-twenty minutes. Earnestly entreat him to cut it short, and if he does not, then stop him. If a man came into my house intending to cut my wife's throat, I would reason with him as to the wrong of it, and then I would effectually prevent him from doing her any harm; and I love the church almost as much as I love my

dear wife. So, if a man will pray long, he may pray long somewhere else, but not at the meeting over which I am presiding. Tell him to finish it up at home if he cannot pray in public for a reasonable length of time. If the people seem dull and heavy, get them to sing Moody and Sankey hymns; and then, when they can sing them all by heart, do not have any more "Moody and Sankey" for a time, but go back to your own hymn book.

Keep up the prayer meeting, whatever else flags; it is the great business evening of the week, the best service between Sabbaths; be you sure to make it so. If you find that your people cannot come in the evening, try and have a prayer meeting when they can come. You might get a good meeting in the country at half-past four in the morning. Why not? You would get more people at five o'clock in the morning than you would at five o'clock at the other end of the day. I believe that a prayer-meeting at six o'clock in the morning among agricultural people would attract many; they would drop in, and just have a few words of prayer, and be glad of the opportunity. Or you might have it at twelve o'clock at night; you would find some people out then whom you could not get at any other time. Try one o'clock, or two o'clock, or three o'clock, or any hour of the day or night, so as somehow or other to get the people out to pray; and if they cannot be induced to come to the meetings, go to their house, and say, "I am going to have a prayer meeting in your parlour." "Oh, dear! my wife will be in a state." "Oh, no! tell her not to trouble, for we can go into the coach-house, or garden, or anywhere, but we must have a prayer meeting here." If they will not come to the prayer meeting, we must go to them; suppose that fifty of us go trudging down the street, and hold a meeting in the open air; well, there might be many worse things than that. Remember how the women fought the liquor sellers in America when they prayed them out of the traffic. If we cannot stir the people without doing extraordinary things, in the name of all that is good and great let us do extraordinary things, but somehow we must keep up the prayer meetings, for they are at the very secret source of power with God and with men.

We must *always set an earnest example ourselves*. A slow-coach minister will not have a lively, zealous church, I am sure. A man who is indifferent, or who does his work as if he took it as easily as he could ought not to expect to have a people around him who are in earnest about the salvation of souls. I know that you, brethren, desire to have about you a band of Christians who long for the salvation of their friends and neighbours, a set of people who will be always expecting that God will bless the preaching of your sermons, who will watch the countenances of your hearers to see if they are getting impressed, and who will be sorely distressed if there are no conversions, and greatly troubled if souls are not saved. Perhaps they would not complain to you if that were the case, but they would cry to God on your behalf. Possibly, they would also speak to you about the matter. I remember one of my deacons saying to me, as we were going

down to the communion, one Sabbath evening, when we had only fourteen to receive into the church, "Governor, this won't pay." We had been accustomed to have forty or fifty every month, and the good man was not satisfied with a smaller number. I agreed with him that we must have more than that in the future if it was possible. I suppose some brethren would have felt annoyed to have had anything like that remark made to them; but I was delighted with what my good deacon said; for it was just what I myself felt.

Then, next, *we want around us Christians who are willing to do all they can to help in the work of winning souls.* There are numbers of people who cannot be reached by the pastor. You must try to get some Christian workers who will "button-hole" people, you know what I mean. It is pretty close work when you hold a friend by a lock of his hair, or by his coat-button. Absalom did not find it easy to get away when he was caught in the oak by the hair of his head. So, try to get at close quarters with sinners; talk gently to them till you have whispered them into the kingdom of heaven, till you have told into their ears the blessed story that will bring peace and joy to their heart. We want in the Church of Christ a band of well-trained sharpshooters, who will pick the people out individually, and be always on the watch for all who come into the place, not annoying them, but making sure that they do not go away without having had a personal warning, a personal invitation, and a personal exhortation to come to Christ. We want to train all our people for this service, so as to make Salvation Armies out of them. Every man, woman or child who is in our churches should be set to work for the Lord. Then they will not relish the fine sermons that the Americans seem to delight in so much; but they will say, "Pooh! Flummery! We don't want that kind of thing." What do people who are at work in the harvest field want with thunder and lightning? They want just to rest a while under a tree, to wipe the sweat from their foreheads, to refresh themselves after their toil, and then to get to work again. Our preaching ought to be like the address of a commander-in-chief to his army, "There are the enemy; do not let me know where they are tomorrow." Something short, something sweet, something that stirs and impresses them, is what our people need.

We are sure to get the blessing we are seeking when *the whole atmosphere in which we are living is favourable to soul-winning.* I remember one of our friends saying to me one evening, "There will be sure to be a blessing tonight, there is such a lot of dew about." May you often know what it is to preach where there is plenty of dew! The Irishman said that it was no use to irrigate while the sun was shining, for he had noticed that, whenever it rained, there were clouds about, so that the sun was hidden. There was a great deal of sense in that observation, more than appears at first sight, as there usually is in Hibernian statements. The shower benefits the plants because everything is suitable for the rain to come down, the shaded sky, the humidity of the atmosphere, the general feeling of everything is damp all around; but if you were to pour the same quantity

of water down while the sun was shining brightly, the leaves would probably be turned yellow, and in the heat they would shrivel and die. Any gardener would tell you that he is always careful to water the flowers in the evening when the sun is off them. This is the reason why irrigation, however well it is done, is not so beneficial as the rain; there must be a favourable influence in the whole atmosphere if the plants and flowers are to derive benefit from the moistening. It is just so in spiritual things. I have often noticed that, when God blesses my ministry to an unusual extent, the people in general are in a praying mood. It is a grand thing to preach in an atmosphere full of the dew of the Spirit. I know what it is to preach with it; and, alas! I know what it is to preach without it. Then is it like Gilboa, when there was no dew nor rain. You may preach, and you may hope that God will bless your message; but it is no use. I hope it will not be so with you, brethren. Perhaps your lot will be cast where some dear brother has long been toiling, and praying, and labouring for the Lord, and you will find all the people just ready for the blessing.

I often feel, when I go out to preach, that there is no credit due to me, for everything is in my favour. There sit the good folk, with their mouths open, waiting for the blessing; almost everybody there is expecting me to say something good, and because they are all looking for it, it does them good, and when I am gone they keep on praying for the blessing, and they get it. When a man is put on a horse that runs away with him, he must ride; that is just how it has frequently been with me, the blessing has been given because all the surroundings were favourable. You may often trace the happy results not only to the preacher's discourse, but to all the circumstances connected with its delivery. It was so with Peter's sermon that brought three thousand souls to Christ on the day of Pentecost; there never was a better sermon preached, it was a plain, personal message likely to convince people of the sin of their treatment of the Saviour in putting Him to death; but I do not attribute the conversions to the apostle's words alone, for there were clouds about, the whole atmosphere was damp; as my friend said to me, there was "plenty of dew about." Had not the disciples been long continuing in prayer and supplication for the descent of the Spirit, and had not the Holy Ghost descended upon every one of them as well as upon Peter? In the fulness of time, the Pentecostal blessing was poured out most copiously. Whenever a church gets into the same state as that of the apostles and disciples at that memorable period, the whole heavenly electricity is concentrated at that particular spot. Yet you remember that even Christ Himself could not do many mighty works in some places because of the people's unbelief, and I am sure that all His servants who are thoroughly in earnest are at times hampered in the same way. Some of our brethren who are here have, I fear, a worldly, Christ-less people; still, I am not sure that they ought to run away from them; I think that, if possible, they should stop, and try to make them more Christlike.

It is true that I have had the other sort of experience, as well as the joyous one I have been describing. I remember preaching one night in a place where they had not had a minister for some time. When I reached the chapel I did not have any kind of welcome; the authorities were to receive pecuniary benefit if nothing else from my visit, but they did not welcome me at all; they said, in fact, that there had been a majority at the church meeting in favour of inviting me, but the deacons did not approve of it because they did not think I was "sound." There were some brethren and sisters from other churches there; they seemed pleased and profited, but the people who belonged to the place did not get a blessing; they had not expected one, so of course they did not receive it. When the service was over I went into the vestry, and there stood the two deacons, one on each side of the mantelpiece. I said to them, "Are you the deacons?" "Yes," they answered. "The church does not prosper, does it?" I asked. "No," they replied. "I should not think it would with such deacons," I said. "Did I know anything against them?" they asked. "No," I said, "but I did not know anything in their favour." I thought that, if I could not get at them in the mass, I would try what I could do with one or two. I was glad to know that my sermon or my remarks afterwards led to an improvement, and there is one of our brethren there, and doing well to this day. One of the deacons was so irritated by what I said that he left the place, but the other deacon was irritated the right way, so that he remained there, and laboured and prayed until better days came. It is hard when you are rowing against wind and tide, but it is worse even than that if you have a horse on the bank pulling a rope, and dragging your boat the other way. Well, never mind, brethren, if that is your case, but work away all the harder, and pull the horse into the water. Still, remember that when once a favourable atmosphere is created, then the difficulty is to maintain it. You notice that I said, "When the atmosphere is created," and that expression reminds us how little we can do, or rather that we can do nothing without God, for it is He who has to do with atmospheres, He alone can create them and maintain them; therefore, our eyes must be continually lifted up to Him, whence cometh all our help.

It may happen that some of you do preach very earnestly and well, and sermons that are likely to be blessed, and yet you do not see sinners saved. Well, do not leave off preaching; but say to yourself, "I must try to gather around me a number of people who will be all praying with me and for me, and who will talk to their friends about the things of God, and who will so live and labour that the Lord will give a blessed shower of grace because all the surroundings are suitable thereto, and help to make the blessing come. I have heard ministers say that when they have preached in the Tabernacle, there has been something in the congregation that has had a wonderfully powerful effect upon them. I think it is because we have good prayer meetings, because there is an earnest spirit of prayer among the people, and because so many of them are on the watch for

souls. There is one brother especially who is always looking after any hearers who have been impressed; I call him my hunting dog, and he is ever ready to pick up the birds I have shot and bring them to me. I have known him waylay them one after another, that he might bring them to Jesus; and I rejoice that I have other friends of this kind. When our brethren, Fullerton and Smith, had been conducting some special services for a very eminent preacher who is in the habit of using rather long words, he said that the evangelists had the faculty for "the precipitation of decision." He meant that the Lord blessed them in bringing men to decision for Christ. It is a grand thing when a man has the faculty for the precipitation of decision; but it is an equally grand thing when he has a number of people around him who say to each hearer after every service, "Well, friend, did you enjoy that discourse? Was there something in it for you? Are you saved? Do you know the way to salvation?"

Always have your own Bible ready, and turn to the passages you want to quote to the enquirers. I often noticed that friend of mine, of whom I spoke just now, and he seemed to me to open his Bible at most appropriate passages, he appeared to have them all ready and handy, so that he would be sure to hit on the right texts. You know the sort of texts I mean, just those that a seeking soul wants: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Well, this brother has a number of such passages printed in bold type, and fastened inside his Bible, so that he can refer to the right one in a moment, and many troubled souls has he thus led to the Saviour. You will not be unwise if you adopt some such method as he has found so exceedingly helpful.

Now lastly, brethren, do not be afraid when you go to a place, and find it in a very bad condition. It is a fine thing for a young man to begin with a real downright bad prospect, for, with the right kind of work, there must come an improvement some time or other. If the chapel is all but empty when you go to it, it cannot well be in a much worse state than that; and the probability is that you will be the means of bringing some into the church, and so making matters better. If there is any place where I would choose to labour, it would be just on the borders of the infernal lake, for I really believe that it would bring more glory to God to work among those who are accounted the worst of sinners. If your ministry is blessed to such people as these, they will be likely to cling to you through your whole life; but the very worst sort of people are those who have long been professing Christians, but who are destitute of grace, having a name to live, and yet being dead. Alas! there are people like that among our deacons, and among our church members, and we cannot get them out; and, as long as they remain they exert a most baneful influence. It is dreadful to have dead members where every single part of the body should be instinct with divine

life; yet in many cases it is so, and we are powerless to cure the evil. We must let the tares grow until the harvest; but the best thing to do, when you cannot root up the tares, is to water the wheat, for there is nothing that will keep back the tares like good strong wheat. I have known ungodly men who have had the place made so hot for them that they have been glad to clear right out of the church. They have said, "The preaching is too strong for us, and these people are too Puritanical and too strict to suit us." What a blessing it is when that is the case! We did not wish to drive them away by preaching the truth; but as they went of their own accord, we certainly do not want them back, and we will leave them where they are praying the Lord, in the greatness of His grace, to turn them from the error of their ways, and to bring them to Himself, and then we shall be glad to have them back with us to live and labour for the Lord.