

[R5554 : page 308]

CATCHING FISH WITH THE GOSPEL NET

"Jesus saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." – Matthew 4:19.

OUR Lord's parables, figures of speech, and more or less "dark sayings," such as this one, were usually based upon incidents connected with His ministry. We remember the context here – He had been preaching at the Sea of Galilee, and had put out in a boat because of the crowd of people. (Luke 5:1-11.) The boat was one that was used in the fishing business, conducted by Peter, James and John. Following this discourse, Jesus invited these men to become His disciples, using the words, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." [R5555 : page 308]

The expression, "fishers of men," suggests many good features illustrative of the work of the Gospel Age. In fishing for fish there is a carefulness exercised that is very necessary to success. The skilful fisherman studies what kind of fish-hook to use and what kind of bait to put on the hook. Then he catches the fish individually. Likewise very much of the work of this Age has been an individual work, accomplished by talking to people; those engaged in it should seek wisdom from on High to put the Message into such form as would be most helpful to people – that they may be caught by the Gospel.

The Lord uses an illustration of a drag-net to represent the work of the Gospel Age. During the past eighteen centuries the drag-net of the Gospel has been passing through the world. It has not caught all the fish; for it has been drawn only through certain parts of the earth which God chose especially to favor. Thus He has drawn a net full; and He says that at the end of this Age there will be a sorting of these fish – a putting some back into the sea, as not worthy, and a retaining of others. Throughout this Age there

have been some drawn by the Gospel who have been unsuitable for God's work; they have not been the kind of people God has wished to choose. Therefore He did not make things so plain for such that they would stay; but rather has left some subjects obscure, in order that such would reject the Truth and turn aside.

THE NATURE OF THE HARVEST WORK

However, aside from this Parable of the Drag-net, which represents the Lord's people as fishers of men, and which might in some respects seem applicable only to the close of the Gospel Age, there is another commission. The general commission to all of the Lord's people applies today. It reads, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the good tidings to the meek; to bind up the broken-hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to the bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion; to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." – Isa. 61:1-3.

We read that when Jesus was speaking to the people He made some remarks, and gave some parables forth, which they could not understand. For instance, He said that unless they would eat of the flesh and drink of the blood of the Son of Man there would be no life in them. They said, Who can understand that? Who can accept that teaching? So they walked no more with Him – they got out of the net. Throughout this Age the Lord has been gathering in the fish. But the great work of selecting is to be accomplished in the end of this Age. To a certain extent in this Age thousands of people have been caught in the Gospel net and have been more or less brought under the influence of the Truth; and yet they are not fit for the Kingdom. Without any unkindness towards them, the Lord now simply puts them out of the place not suitable to them.

We are not to think of this comparison as perfectly representing this matter – but it has an illustrative power to be made useful in this connection. We do not really catch men as a fisherman catches a fish. The fisherman does the fish more or less harm in taking it out of the water, whether with a hook and line or with a drag-net; and those fish which are brought up in the drag-net are not honored in any manner. Our Lord used this illustration merely to represent how the Gospel fishing was to be done. His followers were to fish for men for the Kingdom – not to do them violence, but to do them good. Those who catch fish exercise a great deal of care. While catching the fish, they usually hide themselves, so that the fish will not see *them*, but the *bait*. So in drawing men to the Truth we should hide ourselves and throw out as bait those features of God's Word which would apply to this one or that one with whom we might be dealing.

Coming down to the present time, the question might arise, Is this Gospel Message still to be sent out, or have all the fish been caught and the Gospel net drawn to the shore, and will there be no more received? We answer that we do not so understand. We believe that we are away down in the Harvest of the Age; if not fully at the end of the Age, we believe that it must be very near.

OUR PRESENT ATTITUDE

Looking at the Harvest of the Jewish Age, we see that it was forty years long in one sense of the word; yet the beginning of that forty years was a very indefinite thing – and the closing seemed to extend over six months, perhaps. We remember that in the beginning of our Lord's ministry there came forty days of His temptation; and that then came the time during which His disciples were being gathered to Him. For a year there was very little of importance accomplished. If we consider His experiences as typical, we might consider that the early part of the Harvest was not very sharply marked. The Harvest seemed to increase as it

progressed, and did not culminate until after the destruction of Jerusalem. This fact leads us to wonder if there are not six months more of the Harvest here. **[R5555 : page 309]**

The Lord evidently saw that it would be better for us that we should walk by faith, not by sight, and that we should have the experiences we are having. These experiences are excellent. We have been receiving things so good, so refreshing to us, that if they continue for six months longer, or six years longer, we shall be very glad that the Lord has given us this longer opportunity of testifying to His goodness. On the other hand, it may be that the work of the Harvesting of the "wheat" has been fully accomplished, and that the work of the present time is for the Great Company class and for the world.

"So on we go, not knowing,
We would not if we might;
We'd rather walk in the dark with God
Than go alone in the light;
We'd rather walk by faith with Him
Than go alone by sight."

The consummation of the Gospel Age is now upon us. We are expecting wonderful things, glorious things. The thing especially looked for now is the ending of Gentile dominion. The dissolution of the nations is at hand, and that disintegration precedes the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom.

At what time the Lord's people will be taken beyond the veil the Lord has not fully indicated. But we have the assurance that when He shall appear, be manifested – when His Epiphania shall occur – we shall be with Him, we shall be like Him and see Him as He is. He will not begin His great work of establishing the Kingdom until the Church shall be with Him. We may not understand all that this implies. Perhaps we may be with our Lord, in service on this side the veil for a while. We had not thought so;

but we are simply willing that the Lord's will shall be done,
whatever it may be, and we are waiting for the indications of His
providence.

"We know not what awaits us,
God kindly veils our eyes,
And o'er each step of our onward way
He makes new scenes to rise;
And every joy He sends us comes
A sweet and glad surprise.

"One step we see before us,
'Tis all we need to see,
The light of Heaven more brightly shines,
When earth's illusions flee;
And sweetly through the silence comes
His loving 'Follow Me.'"

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