IS CONVERSION NECESSARY?

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A SERMON
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"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:
old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."
2 Corinthians 5:17

A FEW days ago I was preaching in Lancashire upon the putting away of sin by our Lord Jesus, and the consequent peace of conscience enjoyed by the believer. In the course of the sermon I related my own conversion, with the view of showing that the simple act of looking to Jesus brought peace to the soul.

Now, the diocese of Manchester is presided over by a bishop who has a deservedly high place in public esteem for his zeal, industry, and force of character. And feeling that he did not agree with me, he has very properly taken an opportunity to warn the working men whom he addressed against drawing improper inferences from my story. And he has done this in a manner so courteous that I only wish all discussions were conducted in the same spirit. The best return I can make for his courtesy is to enlarge upon the subject, and carefully guard his utterances from injurious inferences, even as he has protected mine.

The idea of controversy is not upon my mind at all, nor have I any other feeling towards Bishop Fraser than that which is honestly expressed in a hearty prayer that God may bless him. But I am thinking of the many who will read his remarks who, I trust, may afterwards read mine. And as the point is of the utmost conceivable importance, and deeply concerns the souls of our hearers, it is well that neither should be misunderstood and that by all means a truth so vital should be brought into prominence.

The bishop does not doubt for a moment that my own conversion was correctly described by me, and that like cases have occurred at other times, but he fears lest others should suppose that they must be converted in exactly the same manner. In that fear I fully participate, it has ever been a special point with me to show that God's Spirit calls men to Jesus in different ways. Some are drawn so gently that they scarce know when the drawing began, and others are so suddenly affected that their conversion stands out with noonday clearness.

Perhaps no two conversions are precisely alike in detail. The means, the modes, the manifestations, all vary greatly. As our minds are not cast in the same mold, it may so happen that the truth which affects one is powerless upon another. The style of address which influences your friend may be offensive to yourself, and that which leads him to decide may only cause you to delay.

"The wind bloweth where it listeth." The Holy Ghost is called "the free Spirit," and in the diversity of His operations, that freeness is clearly seen. Again and again have I warned you against imitating others in the matter of conversion, lest you be found counterfeits, and it is well when another voice unites with me in the warning.

Yet in all true conversions there are points of essential agreement, there must be in all a penitent confession of sin, and a looking to Jesus for the forgiveness of it. And there must also be a real change of heart such as shall affect the entire life, and where these essential points are not to be found there is no genuine conversion.

The bishop goes on to remark upon Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," and its description of the burdened pilgrim and his finding rest at the cross. The bishop mistakes honest John, for he says that "the

pilgrim having failed to get his wife to take the same gloomy view of fleeing from the wrath to come, and to accompany him in his flight, set out alone. There they had a man who deserted his home and home duties, leaving them to take care of themselves. But if a man stayed at home and his heart was right, he would have been saved in the day of doom." Surely allegory is not to be read in this fashion.

John Bunyan never meant to teach that any man should forsake his home and neglect his family. No one ever charged him with doing so himself. In his imprisonment he worked hard at tagging laces to support his family, and his affection for his poor blind child is well known. John Bunyan was no monk, but as true a father, citizen, and friend as ever lived.

The passage is part of an allegory, and represents an awakened man as resolving to seek the Savior, whether others would do so or not. A man alive to his own condition and responsibility, and therefore determined to pursue the right road even if the nearest and dearest refused to bear him company. It is not implied that he left the company of his family in temporal things, for with these the allegory has nothing to do. I feel sure the bishop knows too well the value of decision of mind, and of that strong resolve to be right which dares to be singular, to say a word wittingly against one of the bravest of the virtues.

The bishop continues, "The pilgrim went on his journey, and at the sight of the cross, the great bundle, which was the burden of his past sins, fell off his back. Falling down before the cross, he thought of Him who hung upon it, and of the great doctrine of atonement, and the burden dropped from his back and he rose what is called 'a converted man.'"

The bishop is inclined to think that this story of Bunyan's conversion has given a color to a great part of what is called Protestant theology in these days. He has noticed that a great number of our theological ideas come rather from Milton and "The Pilgrim's Progress" than from the Bible, for he does not find a single case in the Bible at all analogous to or resembling the case of John Bunyan. He then denies that the case of the penitent thief is at all to the point, or even the conversion of the apostle Paul, and he bids his hearers remember that it is "better not to dream those dreams of conversion that might happen to one and not to another."

Now, so far as Milton is concerned, the bishop is right, but I demur his statement with regard to Bunyan's "Pilgrim," and differ from him altogether in his judgment of Paul's conversion. He fears that some may imagine a particular manner of conversion to be necessary, but my fear is much greater that from Bishop Fraser's words far more will infer that no conversion is necessary at all. My fear is not so much that they should say, "I must be converted like John Bunyan," but that they will whisper, "It is all an idle tale. The bishop means that we have only to do our duty and be sober and honest, and all will be well, whether we are converted or not."

Our text says that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." And my point is just this, that any man who is united to Christ has experienced a great change. I do not lay down hard and fast lines about how the conversion is to be wrought, but the word is imperative which says, "Ye must be born again," and the exhortation speaks to all mankind, "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Even to this hour our Lord saith, "Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

My line of discourse will be as follows, according to our text and many other Scripture, *a great change is needed in any man who would be saved.* Secondly, *this great change is frequently very marked.* And thirdly, *this change is recognizable by distinct signs*.

I. IN ORDER TO SALVATION A RADICAL CHANGE IS NECESSARY.

This change is a thorough and sweeping one, and operates upon the nature, heart, and life of the convert. Human nature is the same to all time, and it will be idle to try to turn the edge of Scriptural quotations by saying that they refer to the Jews or to the heathen, for at that rate we shall have no Bible left us at all. The Bible is meant for mankind, and our text refers to *any* man, of any country, and any age. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

We prove this point by reminding you, first, *that everywhere in Scripture men are divided into two classes*, with a very sharp line of distinction between them. Read in the Gospels, and you shall find continual mention of sheep lost and sheep found, guests refusing the invitation and guests feasting at the table, the wise virgins and the foolish, the sheep and the goats.

In the epistles we read of those who are "dead in trespasses and sin," and of others to whom it is said, "And you hath he quickened," so that some are alive to God and others are in their natural state of spiritual death. We find men spoken of as being either in darkness or in light, and the phrase is used of "being brought out of darkness into marvelous light." Some are spoken of as having been formerly aliens and strangers, and having been made fellow citizens and brethren. We read of "children of God," in opposition to "children of wrath."

We read of believers who are not condemned, and of those who are condemned already because they have not believed. We read of those who have "gone astray," and of those who have "returned to the shepherd and bishop of their souls." We read of those who are "in the flesh and cannot please God," and of those who are chosen and called and justified, whom the whole universe is challenged to condemn.

The apostle speaks of "us who are saved," as if there were some saved while upon others "the wrath of God abideth." "Enemies" are continually placed in contrast with those who are "reconciled to God by the death of his Son." There are those that are "far off from God by wicked works," and those who are "made nigh by the blood of Christ."

I could continue till I wearied you. The distinction between the two classes runs through the whole of the Scriptures, and never do we find a hint that there are some who are naturally good and do not need to be removed from the one class into the other, or that there are persons between the two who can afford to remain as they are. No, there must be a divine work, making us new creatures, and causing all things to become new with us or we shall die in our sins.

The Word of God, besides so continually describing two classes, very frequently and in forcible expressions speaks of an inward change by which men are brought from one state into the other. I hope I shall not weary you if I refer to a considerable number of Scriptures, but it is best to go to the fountainhead at once.

This change is often described as a *birth*. See the third chapter of the Gospel of John, which is wonderfully clear and to the point, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." This birth is not a birth by baptism, for it is spoken of as accompanied by an intelligent faith which receives the Lord Jesus.

Turn to John 1:12-13, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name: which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." So that believers are "born again," and receive Christ through faith, a regeneration imparted in infancy and lying dormant in unbelievers is a fiction unknown to Holy Scripture.

In the third of John our Lord associates faith and regeneration in the closest manner, declaring not only that we must be born again, but also that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. We must undergo a change quite as great as if we could return to our native nothingness and could then come forth fresh from the hand of the Great Creator.

John tells us, in his first epistle, verse four, that "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world," and he adds, to show that the new birth and faith go together, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." To the same effect is 1 John 5:1, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Where there is true faith, there is the new birth, and that term implies a change beyond measure complete, and radical.

In other places this change is described as a *quickening*. "And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). We are said to be raised from the dead together with Christ, and this is spoken of as being a very wonderful display of omnipotence. We read (Eph 1:19), of "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he

wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." Regeneration is a very prodigy of divine strength and by no means a mere figment fabled to accompany a religious ceremony.

We find this change frequently described as a *creation*, as, for instance, in our text, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." And this also is no mere formality, or an attendant upon a rite, for we read in Galatians 6:15, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." No outward rites, though ordained of God Himself, effect any change upon the heart of man, there must be a creating over again of the entire nature by the divine hand. We must be "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph 2:10), and we must have in us "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24).

What a wonderful change that must be which is first described as a birth, then as a resurrection from the dead, and then as an absolute creation.

Paul, in Colossians 1:13, further speaks of God the Father, and says, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." John calls it a "passing from death unto life" (1 John 3:14), no doubt having in his mind that glorious declaration of his Lord and Master, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

Once more, as if to go to the extremity of forcible expression, Peter speaks of our conversion and regeneration as our being "begotten again." Hear the passage (1 Peter 1:3), "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." To the same purport speaks the apostle James in his first chapter, at the eighteenth verse, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

My dear friends, can you conceive of any language more plainly descriptive of a most solemn change? If it be possible with the human tongue to describe a change which is total, thorough, complete, and divine, these words do describe it. And if such a change be not intended by the language here used by the Holy Spirit, then I am unable to find any meaning in the Bible, and its words are rather meant to bewilder than to instruct, which God forbid we should think.

My appeal is to you who try to be contented without regeneration and conversion. I beseech you, do not be satisfied, for you never can be in Christ unless old things are passed away with you, and all things become new.

Further, *the Scriptures speak of this great inner work as producing a very wonderful change in the subject of it*. Regeneration and conversion, the one the secret cause, and the other the first overt effect, produce a great change in the character. Read Romans 6:17, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." Again at verse 22, "Now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

Mark well the description the apostle gives in Colossians 3:9, when, having described the old nature and its sins, he says, "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man." The Book swarms with proof texts. The change of character in the converted man is so great, that "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal 5:24).

And as there is a change in character, so there is a change in feeling. The man had been an enemy to God before, but when this change takes place he begins to love God. Read Colossians 1:21, "And you, that were some time alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprovable in his sight."

This change from enmity to friendship with God arises very much from a change of man's judicial state before God. Before a man is converted he is condemned, but when he receives spiritual life we read

"there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." This altogether changes his condition as to inward happiness. "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord," which peace we never had before. "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."

O brethren, conversion makes a difference in us most mighty indeed, or else what did Christ mean when He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? Does He after all give us no rest? Is the man who comes to Jesus just as restless and as devoid of peace as before? God forbid!

Does not Jesus say that when we drink of the water which He gives to us we shall never thirst again? What! And are we to be told that there is never a time when we leave off thirsting, never a time when that living water becomes in us a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life? Our own experience refutes the suggestion. Does not Paul say in Hebrews 4:3, "We which have believed do enter into rest"? Our condition before God, our moral tone, our nature, our state of mind are made by conversion totally different from what they were before. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Why, beloved, instead of supposing that we can do without conversion, the Scriptures represent this as being the grand blessing of the covenant of grace. What said the Lord by His servant Jeremiah? "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after these days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33). This passage Paul quotes in the Hebrews 10:16, not as obsolete, but as fulfilled in believers.

And what has the Lord said by Ezekiel? (Eze 36:26-27). Listen to the gracious passage, and see what a grand blessing conversion is—"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh; and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." Is not this *the* blessing of the Gospel by which we realize all the rest? Is not this the great work of the Holy Ghost by which we know the Father and the Son? And is not this needful to make us in accord with future glory? "He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21:5).

There is to be a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth shall pass away, and can we believe that the old carnal nature is to enter into the new creation? Is that which is born of the flesh to enter into the spiritual kingdom? Never can it be. No, a change as wonderful as that which will pass over this world when Christ shall re-create it, must pass over each one of us, if it be not so already. In a word, if we be in Christ Jesus we are new creatures, old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.

Do you know anything about this? I trust that a great number of you have experienced it, and are showing it in your lives. But I fear some are ignorant of it. Let those who are unconverted never rest till they have believed in Christ and have a new heart created and a right spirit bestowed. Lay it well to heart, that a change must come over you which you cannot work in yourselves, but which must be wrought by divine power. There is this for your comfort, that Jesus Christ has promised this blessing to all who receive Him, for He gives them power to become the sons of God.

II. Secondly, I now remark that THIS CHANGE IS FREQUENTLY VERY MARKED AS TO ITS TIME AND CIRCUMSTANCES.

Many souls truly born of God could not lay their finger upon any date and say, "At such a time I passed from death unto life." There was such a time, however, though they may not be able to fix upon it. The act of conversion is often, as to many of its circumstances, so surrounded by preceding works of restraining grace that it appears to be a very gradual thing, and the rising of the sun of righteousness in the soul is comparable to the dawning of day, with a gray light at first, and a gradual increase to a noonday splendor.

Yet, as there is a time when the sun rises, so is there a time of new birth. If a dead man were restored to life, he might not be able to say exactly when life began, but there is such a moment. There must be a time when a man ceases to be an unbeliever and becomes a believer in Jesus. I do not assert that it is necessary for us to know the day, but such a time there is.

In many cases, however, the very day and hour and place are fully known, and we might expect this, first, *from many other works of God*. How very particular God is about the time of creation! "The evening and the morning were the first day." "God said, 'Let there be light,' and months afterwards there came a little gray dawning, and a solitary star."

Oh no, you say, you are quoting from imagination! I am. The Scripture has it, "God said, Let there be light: and there was light." Immediate work is God's method of creating. All through the six days' work He spake and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast. There is generally a likeness between one act of God and another, and if in the old creation the fiat did it all, it does seem likely upon the very face of things that in the new creation the fiat of the eternal Word should be equally quick and powerful in its working.

Look at the acts of God in the person of Christ when He was here among men. The water turns at once to wine, the fig tree immediately withers away, the loaves and fishes are at once multiplied in the hands of the disciples. Miracles of healing were as a rule instantaneous. In one instance the Lord puts clay on the blind man's eyes, and sends him to wash, but lengthen the operation as much as you like, it is still very briefly summed up in "I washed and do see."

Yonder paralytic man is lying on his bed, Jesus says to him, "Take up thy bed and walk," and he does so at once. The leprosy was cured with a touch, devils fled at a word, ears were unstopped instantly, and withered limbs restored. He spake to the waves and the winds and they were calm at once. And as to the resurrections which Christ worked, which are His acted parables of regeneration, they were all instantaneous. Jesus took the little girl by the hand and said, "*Talitha cumi*," she opened her eyes and sat up. He bade the bier stand still on which was the young man, He said—"Young man, I say unto thee, arise," and he arose straightway.

Even the carcass of Lazarus, which had begun to corrupt, yielded at once to His word. He did but say, "Lazarus, come forth," and there was Lazarus. As the Master worked on men's bodies, so does He constantly work upon men's souls, and it is according to analogy to expect that His works will be instantaneous. Such they constantly are, for are they not daily before us?

We might also look for many instances of vividness if we consider the work itself. If it be worthy to be called a resurrection, there must manifestly be a time in which the dead man ceases to be dead and becomes alive. Take the opposite process of dying, we commonly say that such a man was long in dying. That is a popular description, but strictly speaking, the actual death must be instantaneous. There is a time in which there is breath in the body, and another time in which there is none.

So must it be in the reception of life. That life may seem to come by slow degrees into the soul, but it cannot really be so. There must be an instant up to which there was no life, and beyond which life began. Is not that self-evident? Isn't it wonderful that that instant should fix itself on the memory, and in many cases be the most prominent fact in a man's whole history?

It is called a creation. Now creation is necessarily a work which happens in an instant, for a thing either is or is not. There is no intervening space between non-existence and existence. There is the sharpest conceivable line between that which is not and that which is. So in the new creation there must be a time when grace is not received, and a time when renewing it is, and we may naturally expect that in so grand a work there would be, in many cases, a marked boundary line at which the work begins.

But brethren, we need not talk of what we might expect, let us look at the facts. What are the facts about the conversions mentioned in Scripture? We hear much of educational processes which supersede conversion, but they are among the many inventions unknown to apostolic history.

The bishop tells us that he does not find a single case in the Bible at all resembling the case of John Bunyan. It is very curious how very differently we read. I at once turn to Paul, but the bishop says he is

not a case in point, for he did not feel the burden of sin fall off his back. I cannot guess how the bishop knows what Paul endured during his three days' blindness, but my own notion, gathered from Paul's after sayings and doings, is very different.

The man was one moment an opponent of Christ and the next moment was crying, "Who art thou, Lord?" For three days he was blind and fasted. Was he not then feeling the power of the law, and casting away his own righteousness? And when Ananias came to tell him more fully the Gospel, and to bid him arise and be baptized, and wash away his sins, was there no removal of sin? Did he remain as before?

There were two things spoken of, he was to be baptized, and also to receive another and spiritual washing, was the first real and not the second? The apostle always speaks of the whole thing as if he had cast away his own righteousness and counted it but dung to lay hold on Christ, and he continually glories in having peace with God, though he did not claim perfection in the flesh.

He had not attained perfection, but he had attained salvation. He calls himself the chief of sinners, but this was as a retrospect. Surely Bishop Fraser does not really mean to insinuate that the great apostle still remained the chief of sinners? If so, I must say the morality of his teaching is not such as one would expect from him.

Some have said that Paul's case is a special and solitary one. But this is an error, for he says himself, that Jesus Christ in him showed forth all longsuffering *for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting* (1 Tim 1:15-16). That which is a pattern is not a special case. Though the Lord does not always work to a pattern in details, yet the case of Paul suddenly converted is the pattern rather than the exception.

Let us look at other instances. A Samaritan woman comes to the well to draw water, Christ speaks to her, she is converted, and goes away to tell the men of the city. Is not that a case of sudden conversion?

Zaccheus is in a tree, he is a rich publican, and a sinner. Jesus cries, "Zaccheus, make haste and come down." He comes down, receives Jesus into his house, and proves his salvation by his works. Is not that a sudden conversion?

Matthew sits at the receipt of custom, another publican and sinner, Jesus says, "Follow me." He rises and follows Jesus. Is not that a sudden conversion?

Three thousand persons gather at Pentecost, Peter preaches to them and tells them that Jesus whom they had murdered was really the Christ of God. They are pricked in the heart, they believe, and are baptized on the same day. Have we not here three thousand sudden conversions? Sudden enough to prove my point.

Further on, the jailer has gone to his bed, having fastened Paul and Silas in the stocks. His prisoners pray and sing praises unto God, there is an earthquake, the jailer in alarm cries, "What must I do to be saved?" He believes in Jesus there and then, and is baptized with his believing household.

Are not these "at all analogous to John Bunyan's pilgrim" and his losing his load? It really seems to me as if it would be much more difficult to find a gradual conversion in Scripture than a sudden one, for here they come, one after another, men and women brought to Jesus Christ who knew Him not before, in whom the Scripture is fulfilled, "I am found of them that sought me not."

Furthermore, we need not go back to Scripture for this. The matter of the conversion of souls is one about which I feel it a weariness to argue, because these wonders of grace happen daily before our eyes, and it is like trying to prove that the sun rises in the morning.

By the space of twenty years there has certainly never occurred to me a single week, and I might with truthfulness say scarcely a solitary day, in which I have not heard of persons being converted by the simple preaching of the Gospel either here or elsewhere, when I have borne witness for Christ. And these conversions have been in far the greater majority of instances very clear and well-defined.

Sometimes the children of godly parents who have been long hearing the Word are converted, and in them the inward change is as marked as if they had never heard the Gospel before. Infidels become believers, Romanists forsake their priests, harlots become chaste, drunkards leave their cups, and what is equally remarkable, Pharisees leave their self-righteous pride and come as sinners to Jesus.

Why, if this were the proper time and place, I might say to you now assembled, "Brothers and sisters, you who have experienced a great change, and know that you have experienced it, and can tell how it came about, stand up!" and you would rise in numbers like a host and declare, "Thus and thus, God met with us under the preaching of His truth, and thus did He turn us from darkness to marvelous light."

I would to God that every man that heareth me this day had received such a distinct conversion that it would be so plain to him that he was a new creature that he could no more doubt it than he can doubt his existence.

III. Thirdly, THIS CHANGE IS RECOGNIZABLE BY CERTAIN SIGNS.

It has been supposed by some that the moment a man is converted he thinks himself perfect. It is not so among us, for we rather question the conversion of any man who thinks himself perfect. It is thought by others that a converted man must be henceforth free from all doubts. I wish it were so. Unhappily, although there is faith in us, unbelief is there also. Some dream that the converted man has nothing more to seek for, but we teach not so. A man who is alive unto God has greater needs than ever. Conversion is the beginning of a lifelong conflict. It is the first blow in a warfare which will never end till we are in glory.

In every case of conversion there are these signs following. There is always *a sense of sin*. No man, rest assured, ever found peace with God without first repenting of sin, and knowing it to be an evil thing. The horrors which some have felt are not essential, but a full confession of sin before God, and an acknowledgment of our guilt, is absolutely required. "The whole," says Christ, "have no need of a physician, but they that are sick; I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Christ does not heal those who are not sick, He never clothes those who are not naked, nor enriches those who are not poor. True conversion always has in it a humbling sense of the need of divine grace.

It is also always attended with simple, true, and real faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, that is the King's own mark, and without it nothing is of any worth. "Like as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And that passage is put side by side with, "ye must be born again," in the same address, by the same Savior, to the same inquirer. Therefore we gather that faith is the mark of the new birth, and where it is, there the Spirit has changed the heart of man, but where it is not, men are still "dead in trespasses and sin."

Conversion may be known, next, by this fact, that it changes the whole man. It changes the principle upon which he lives. He lived for self, now he lives for God. He did right because he was afraid of punishment if he did wrong, but now he shuns evil because he hates it. He did right because he hoped to merit heaven, but now no such selfish motive sways him. He knows that he is saved and he does right out of gratitude to God.

His objects in life are changed, he lived for gain, or worldly honor, now he lives for the glory of God. His comforts are changed, the pleasures of the world and sin are nothing to him, he finds his comfort in the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. His desires are changed, that which he once panted and pined for he is now content to do without. And that which he once despised he now longs after as the hart panteth after the water brooks. His fears are different, he fears man no more, but fears his God. His hopes are also altered. His expectations fly beyond the stars.

"He looks for a city which hands have not piled;
He pants for a country by sin undefiled."

The man has begun a new life. A convert once said, "Either the world is altered or else I am." Everything seems new. The very faces of our children look different to us, for we regard them under a new aspect, viewing them as heirs of immortality. We view our friends from a different standpoint. Our

very business seems altered. Even taking down the shutters of a morning is done by the husband in a different spirit, and the children are put to bed by the mother in another mood.

We learn to sanctify the hammer and the plow by serving the Lord with them. We feel that the things which are seen are shadows, and the things which we hear are but voices out of dreamland, but the unseen is substantial, and that which mortal ear hears not is truth. Faith has become to us "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

I may go on to talk about this, but none will understand me except those who have experienced it, and let not those who have not experienced it say it is not true. How do they know? How can a man bear witness to what he has *not* seen? What is the value of testimony from a man who begins by saying, "I know nothing about it"? If a credible witness declares that he knows such a thing to have happened it would be easy to find fifty persons who can say that they did not see it, but their evidence goes for nothing.

Here are men of position, quite as keen in business, and able to judge between fact and fiction as other men, and they tell you solemnly that they have themselves experienced a wonderful, thorough, and total change of nature. Surely if their honest testimony would be taken in any court of law, it ought to be taken in this case. Brethren, I pray that we may know what this change is, and if we do know it, I again pray that we may so live that others may see the result of it upon our characters, and inquire what it means.

The phenomena of conversion are the standing miracles of the church. "Greater things than these shall ye do," said Christ, "because I go to my Father." And these are some of the greater things which the power of the Holy Ghost still performs. This day the dead are raised, blind eyes are opened, and the lame are made to walk. The spiritual miracle is greater than the physical one. These spiritual miracles show that Jesus lives and puts life and power into the Gospel.

Tell me of a ministry which never reclaims the drunkard, never calls back the thief to honesty, never pulls down the self-righteous and makes him confess his sin, that in a word never transforms its hearers, and I am sure that such a ministry is not worth the time which men spend in listening to it. Woe unto the man who at the last shall confess to a ministry fruitless in conversions.

If the Gospel does not convert men, do not believe in it. But if it does, it is its own evidence, and must be believed. It may be to some of you a stumbling block, and to others foolishness, but unto those who believe, it is the power of God unto salvation, saving them from sin.

Beloved hearers, may we all meet in heaven. But to meet in heaven we must all be renewed, for inside yonder gates of pearl none can enter but those who are new creatures in Christ Jesus our Lord. God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 3

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—175, 448, 603

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