

THE TWO DRAUGHTS OF FISHES

NO. 443

A SERMON

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon,
Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.”
Luke 5:4*

*“And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.
They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.”
John 21:6*

THE whole life of Christ was a sermon. He was a prophet mighty in word and deed, and by His deeds as well as His words He taught the people. It is perfectly true that the miracles of Christ attest His mission. To those who saw them they must have been evident proof that He was sent of God. But we ought not to overlook that probably a higher reason for the miracles is to be found in the instruction which they convey. To the world without, at the present time, the miracles of Christ are more hard to believe than the doctrine which He taught. Skeptics turn them into stones of stumbling, and when they cannot cavil at the marvelous teaching of Jesus, they attack the miracles as monstrous and incredible.

I doubt not that even to minds seriously vexed with unbelief, the miracles, instead of being helps to belief, have been trials of faith. Few indeed are there in whom faith is wrought by signs and wonders, nor indeed is this the Gospel way of bringing conviction to the soul, the secret force of the living word is the chosen instrumentality of Christ, and wonders are left to be the resort of that Anti-Christ by whom the nations shall be deceived.

We, who by grace have believed, view the miracles of Christ as noble attestations to His mission and divinity, but we confess that we value them even more as instructive homilies than as attesting witnesses, it is our conviction that we should lose much of the benefit which they were meant to convey to us, if we were merely to view them as seals to the roll, for they are a part of the writing of the roll itself.

The marvels wrought by our blessed Lord are acted sermons fraught with holy doctrine, set forth to us more vividly than it could have been in words. We start with the assumption upon which our sermon will be grounded this morning, that Christ's miracles are sermons preached in deeds, visible allegories, truths embodied, principles incarnated and set in motion, they are in fact, the pictures in the great book of Christ's teaching, the illustrations by which He flashed light into dim eyes.

We have heard of some ministers who could say that they had often preached from the same text, but they had never delivered the same discourse. The like may be said of Christ. He often preached upon the same truth, but it was never precisely in the same manner. We have read in your hearing this morning, the narrative of two miracles (Luke 5 and John 21) which seem to the casual observer to be precisely alike, but he who shall read diligently and study carefully, will find that though the text is the same in both, the discourse is full of variations.

In both the miraculous draughts of fishes, the text is the mission of the saints to preach the Gospel—the work of man-catching—the ministry by which souls are caught in the net of the Gospel, and brought out of the element of sin to their eternal salvation. The preacher is compared to a fisherman. The fisherman's vocation is a toilsome one, woe be to that minister who finds his calling to be otherwise.

The fisherman must go forth in rough weathers and at all hazards, if he should only fish in a calm sea he may often starve. So the Christian minister, whether men will receive the Word with pleasure, or reject it with anger and wrath, must be ready to imperil reputation and risk comfort, yea, he must hate his own life also, or he is not worthy of the heavenly calling.

The fisherman's is a rough occupation, no dainty fingers may come in contact with his nets. It is not a trade for gentlemen, but for rough, strong, fearless men, who can heave a rope, handle a tar-brush, or scour a deck. The ministry is not meant for your dainty souls who would go delicately through this world without a trial, an offense, an insult, or a sneer. Such work is meant for men who know how to do business on great waters, and can go abroad upon the sea, not fearing the spray or the waves.

The fisherman's calling, too, must be carried on perseveringly, it is not by one grand haul that a man makes his fortune, he must constantly cast forth his net. One sermon makes not a preacher, he who shall but now and then deliver himself of some carefully prepared oration, is no true minister of God. He must be instant in season and out of season, he must cast his net in all waters, he must in the morning be at his work, and in the evening he must not withhold his hand.

To be a fisherman, a man must expect disappointments, he must often cast in the net and bring up nothing but weeds. The minister of Christ must reckon upon being disappointed, and he must not be weary in well-doing for all his disappointments, but must in faith continue in prayer and labor, expecting that at the end he shall receive his reward. It needs no great labor for you to work out at leisure the comparison between fishermen and the Gospel ministry, the simile is so aptly chosen.

The two narratives before us have a degree of uniformity, that shall be our first point. But they have a greater degree of dissimilarity, we will bring that out in the second place. And then thirdly, we will suggest some great lessons which they both combine to teach us.

I. First then, IN THESE TWO MIRACLES THERE ARE MANY POINTS OF UNIFORMITY. They are both intended to set forth the way in which Christ's kingdom shall increase.

1. First you will perceive that in both miracles we are taught that *the means must be used*. In the first case, the fish did not leap into Simon's boat to be taken, nor, in the second case, did they swarm from the sea and lay themselves down upon the blazing coals that they might be prepared for the fisherman's feast. No, the fishermen must go out in their boat, they must cast the net, and after having cast the net, they must either drag it ashore, or fill both boats with its contents.

Everything is done here by human agency. It is a miracle, certainly, but yet neither the fisherman, nor his boat, nor his fishing tackle are ignored, they are all used and all employed. Let us learn that in the saving of souls God works by means, that so long as the present economy of grace shall stand, God will be pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

Every now and then there creeps up in the church a sort of striving against God's ordained instrumentality. I marked it with sorrow during the Irish Revival. We constantly saw in some excellent papers remarks which I thought exceedingly injurious, wherein it was made a subject of congratulation that no man was concerned in the work, no eminent preacher, no fervent evangelist, the whole was boasted to be conducted without human instrumentality. That was the weakness of the Revival, not its strength.

You say it gave God more glory. Not so. God gets the most glory through the use of instruments. When God works without instruments, doubtless He is glorified, but He knows Himself in which way He gets the most honor, and He has Himself selected the plan of instrumentality as being that by which He is most magnified in the earth.

We have this treasure. How? Alone? Without any earthly accompaniment? No, but in earthen vessels. What for? That God may have less glory? No, but in the earthen vessels on purpose "that the excellency of the power may be of God," and not of us. God makes the infirmity of the creature to be the foil to the strength of the Creator. He takes men who are nothing in themselves and works by them His splendid victories.

Perhaps, we would not admire Samson so much if he had dashed the Philistines in pieces with his fist, as we do when we find that with such a weapon, so unadapted to the work, as the jawbone of an ass, he laid on heaps the thousands of his foes. The Lord takes ill weapons, that with them He may work great deeds.

When He said, "Let there be light, and there was light" without any instrument, He showed His glory, but when instead thereof He takes the apostles and says again, "Let there be light," and sends *them* forth who were darkness in themselves, and makes them the medium of lighting up a dark world, I say there is a greater glory, and if the morning stars sang together when they first saw light upon the new-made earth, surely the angels in heaven rejoiced yet more when they saw light thus streaming upon the dark earth through men, who, in and of themselves, would only have increased the blackness and made the gloom more dense.

God works by means of men whom He especially calls to His work, and not as a rule without them. The Plymouthist strives to get rid of the pastorate, but he never can, for the Lord will ever continue to give pastors after His own heart to feed His people, and all attempts made by the flock to dispense with these pastors will lead to leanness and poverty of soul. The outcry against the "one man ministry" comes not of God, but of proud self-conceit, of men who are not content to learn although they have no power to teach.

It is the tendency of human nature to exalt itself which has raised up these disturbers of the peace of God's Israel, for they will not endure to submit themselves to the authorities which God has Himself appointed, and abhor the teachings of the apostle, where he says, by the Spirit of God, "Obey them that have rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable to you."

Brethren, I warn you, there is a spirit abroad which would pull down the men whom God Himself has raised up, that would silence those into whose mouths God has put the tongue of fire, that foolish men might prate according to their own will to the profit of no one, and to their own shame. As for us, we shall I trust, never cease to recognize that agency by which the Lord works mightily among us. We would check no ministry in the church of God. We would but be too glad to see it more abundantly exercised. Would God that all the Lord's servants were prophets!

But we enter our solemn protest against that spirit which, under presence of liberty to all, sets aside the instrumentality by which the Lord especially works. He will have you still keep the fishermen to their nets and to their boats, and your new ways of catching fish without nets, and saving souls without ministers, will never answer, for they are not of God.

They have been tried, and what has been the result of the trial? I know not a church in existence that has despised instrumentality, but it has come to an end within a few years either by schism or decay. Where upon the face of the earth is there a single church that has existed fifty years where God's chosen instrumentality of ministry has been despised and rejected? "Ichabod!" is written upon their walls. God rejects them because they reject God's chosen way of working. Their attempts are flashes in the pan, meteoric lights, will-o'-the-wisps, swellings of proud flesh, bubbles of foam, here today and gone forever on the morrow.

2. Again, in both our texts there is another truth equally conspicuous, namely, that *means of themselves are utterly unavailing*. In the first case you hear the confession, "Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing." In the last case you hear them answer to the question, "Children, have ye no meat?" "No"—a sorrowful No.

What was the reason of this? Were they not fishermen plying their special calling? Verily, they were no raw hands, they understood the work. Had they gone about the toil unskillfully? No. Had they lacked industry? No, they had *toiled*. Had they lacked perseverance? No, they had toiled *all the night*. Was there a deficiency of fish in the sea? Certainly not, for as soon as the Master comes there they by shoals. What then is the reason? Is it not because there is no power in the means of themselves apart from the presence of Christ?

The Great Worker who does not discard the means would still have His people know that He uses instrumentality, not to glorify the instrument, but for the sake of glorifying Himself. He takes weakness into His hands and makes it strong, not that weakness may be worshipped, but that the strength may be adored which even makes weakness subservient to His might.

Brethren, let us as a church always keep this in mind, that without Christ we can do nothing. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD.” Put no dependence upon societies, upon committees, upon ministries, upon anything that we can do. Let us work as if it all depended upon us, but let us come to God depending upon Him, knowing of a surety that it does not rest with us, but with Him alone.

Let us send forth the missionaries to the heathen, let us send forth our men into the dark streets and lanes of London, let us scatter tracts, let us distribute the Word of God, let us send forth preachers by scores from our “School of the Prophets,” but when this is done, let us not sit still and say, “Now it is all accomplished, good must come of it.” Nay, Lord, unless Your blessing descend from on high, as well might we have done nothing, for no eternal results can follow.

How often this drives me to my knees. The surprising work which God is doing in connection with this place lifts up my heart with joy, but then the fear lest it all should come to nothing for lack of His blessing casts my spirit to the very earth.

You will remember, I dare say, that one brother was moved some time ago to distribute a volume of the sermons preached here to every student in Oxford and Cambridge. After that had been done, and some two hundred thousand sermons had been distributed, he then gave them to every member of Parliament, to every peer of the realm, and to princes, kings, and emperors of Europe, and having accomplished that work, he has another in hand of great magnitude.

Dear friends, as I think of these books traveling everywhere among high and low, the rich and poor in all places of the land, my heart is glad, but then, if God withholds the blessing, as well had they never been born in the press and circulated by human hand. What good can they do? Let the net be never so broad, never so strong, and let it be never so industriously cast into the sea, yet we shall toil all the night and take nothing unless the Master comes to own the work.

Let us, then, be always in prayer for the blessing. Let us remember that we have done nothing until we have prayed over what we have done, let us consider that all the seed we have put into the ground is put there for worms to eat, unless we have dropped into the soil the preserving grain of prayer to keep that other grain alive. We shall have harvests if we wait on God for them, but after all our sowing, if we look to the soil, the seed, or the sower, we shall see nothing for our pains.

3. Thirdly, there is clearly taught in both these miracles the fact that it is *Christ’s presence that confers success*. Christ sat in Peter’s boat. It was His will that by a mysterious influence drew the fish to the net, as though He had a hook, a secret hook in each of their jaws, could stop them in their sportive leaps, and hurry them all to one common center. It was His presence on the dry land, when He spoke from off the shore to His toiling disciples out yonder and said, “Cast the net on the right side of the ship”—it was His presence that drew the fish to the place where they were taken.

Oh, brethren, we must learn this—that it is Christ’s presence in the midst of the church that is the church’s power—the shout of a King in the midst of her. It is the presence of Christ’s great representative, the Holy Spirit, that is to give the church force. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” There is the attraction. The Spirit gives the power, and we must tarry until we get it, but when we have it, then we cannot preach in vain, for we become “a savor of life unto life” to those who hear.

Christians, Christ’s presence with you must be your power. Be much in fellowship with Him, catch much of His Spirit, meditate much upon His sufferings, keep close to His person, and then, wherever you go there shall be a power about you which even your adversaries shall be compelled to acknowledge.

Oh, that we had more of Christ’s presence in us as a church! Lift up your hearts for it. If Christ be here at all, let us not grieve Him. “I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up nor

awake my love till he please.” And if He be not here let us rise from the bed of our sloth and go forth and seek Him, crying, “Oh, thou whom my soul loveth, tell me where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon!” And if you find Him, I charge you hold Him, and let Him not go till you bring Him into our mother’s house, into the chamber of her that bore us, even the church of Christ, there will we hold Him, there will we embrace Him, and He shall show to us His loves.

4. In both instances *the success* which attended the instrumentality through Christ’s presence *developed human weakness*. We do not see human weakness more in non-success than in success. In the first instance, in the success you see the weakness of man, for the net breaks and the ships begin to sink, and Simon Peter falls down with—“Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” He did not know so much about that till his boat was filled, but the very abundance of God’s mercy made him feel his own nothingness. In the last case, they were scarcely able to draw the net because of the multitude of fishes.

Brethren, if you or I would know to the fullest extent what utter nothings we are, if the Lord shall give us success in winning souls we shall soon find it out. As we see first one, and then another, and then scores, and then hundreds brought to the Lord Jesus, we shall say, “Who hath begotten me these? how can such wonders be wrought by me?” And we shall fall prostrate before the footstool of sovereign grace, and confess that we are unworthy of such amazing favors.

Let the church spread, let her conquests be many, let her overrun whole provinces with her heavenly arms, and instead of man becoming more famous, man shall sink lower and lower, and it shall be more and more fully perceived that it is the Lord. Little works, such as have been common in our churches for years, where twos and threes are added, are quite consistent with great self-congratulation, and so is utter barrenness—mark the pompous carriage of many a fruitless preacher and see if it be not so.

Let the Lord make bare His arm and the man humbles himself in the dust, for when hundreds are ingathered, this cannot be the minister, this is the finger of God. The man is forgotten then, in the very abundance of his success, and the Lord alone is magnified in that day.

Oh that God would do in the churches of England some great and stupendous works by all His ministers! then would they discover their own weakness, and then would the name of God be glorified. You frequently meet with the observation, if a man be successful in winning souls, “I am afraid he will grow proud, how we ought to pray that he may be kept humble!” Brethren, that is a very necessary prayer for anybody, but it is no more necessary for the man who is successful than for the unsuccessful one, in fact, it is an assumption of pride on any person’s part to think that he has less need to pray against pride than any other man.

Think not that when the church prospers it becomes necessarily proud. Nay, the very fullness of the boat makes it sink, and the very abundance of the miracle makes us cry out the more, “It is the Lord,” for we feel that it could not have been of man, for it is out of man’s reach to have accomplished such wonders.

So far then, there is a likeness running through the whole. Means must be used, means alone, unavailing, Christ’s presence gives the success, that success develops human weakness, and leads to the exclamation—“It is the Lord.”

II. Having then shown the likeness, you will be still more interested in REMARKING THE DISSIMILARITY.

Allow us to say in the commencement, that we think the first picture represents the church of God as we see it, the second represents it as it really is. The first pictures to us the visible, the second the invisible. Luke tells us what the crowd see, John tells us what Christ showed to His disciples alone. The first is common truth which the multitude may receive, the next is special mystery revealed only to spiritual minds. Observe then carefully, the points of divergence.

1. First, there is a difference in the orders given. In the first, it is, “Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.” In the second it is, “Cast the net on the right side of the ship.” The first is Christ’s order to every minister, the second is the secret work of His Spirit in the Word.

The first shows us that the ministry is to fish anywhere and everywhere. All the orders that the Christian has, as to his preaching, is, “Launch out into the deep, and let down your net.” He is not to single out any particular character, he is to preach to everybody, sensible sinners and insensible sinners, he is to preach to the dead dry bones of the valley as well as to the living souls. He is not to look where the fish are, but just to throw the net in, doing as his Master tells him. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

Those ministers who preach only to the elect should remember this. Our business is to include all sorts of fish, and not to be particular about where we are, but just splash the net in. What if we be in town, or city, or village? what if we be among the rich or poor, learned or illiterate? what if we be among the debauched or immoral? we have nothing to do with that—our duty is the same, to “Launch out into the deep, and let down the net”—that is all. Christ will find the fish, it is no business of ours.

The secret truth is, that when we are doing this, the Lord knows how to guide us, so that we “cast the net on the right side of the ship.” That is the secret and invisible work of the Spirit, whereby He so adapts our ministry, which is in itself general, that He makes it particular and special. We speak to all, and He speaks to some.

We blow the trumpet, but only the bankrupt debtors hear it, only those who are truly of the Spirit of God know the joyful sound and rejoice therein. *We* cannot single them out, but God can. We thrust in the blessed loadstone of the Gospel, and that heavenly magnet has an affinity to some hearts which God has quickened, so that as many as were ordained unto eternal life believe.

The apostles preached to the crowd, but the Lord God the Holy Spirit, who had decreed the salvation of His chosen, sent the word home with power to the chosen and separated ones.

What a joy it is to think that we always have a picked congregation here, for the Lord has picked them! Though they are crowded together promiscuously—here the good and there the bad, all sorts mingled and mixed together—yet God brings them in according to His eternal purpose, and all the while there is a core of chosen souls inside the mass of the congregation to whom God is applying the Word. We cast the net, after all, on the right side of the ship, and we do find it fill.

2. In the first instance you will clearly see that there is a distinct plurality. The fishermen have nets—in the plural, they have boats—in the plural. There is plurality of agency employed. Each man seems to come out distinctly. In the next case, it is one. There are many men, but they are all in *one boat*. They unitedly drag the net, and it is but *one net*—there is no division, it is all one. Now, this is the visible and the invisible.

To us, the means that God makes use of to bring sinners to Himself are various. Sometimes we are in one boat trying to catch all the fish we can. There is another boat over yonder, and they are trying to do the same. We ought to consider them as being partners, and whenever our boat gets too full, we should beckon to our partners in the other ship to come and help us. We ought not to look upon those brethren who differ from us as though they were emptying the sea, and rivaling against us. The more the merrier. The more men to do good, the more will the Lord’s name be praised.

I think, in many of our towns where some of our whining brethren say that all good people should go to one chapel, that it is far better to have three or four. I question whether the plurality of agency involved in denominations is not a great boon and blessing. Instead of, in the slightest degree, standing out against my brethren for carrying out their convictions, I praise them and look upon them as partners in another ship. Our denominational distinctions help to keep us awake, thus we stir one another up, and do far more good in the world than would be the case if there were only a nominal church.

God would have the agency diverse. There must be several nets, and there must be several fishermen, and these fishermen in different boats. So far as we are able to see, there will always be a Paul and a Barnabas, who cannot get on together, there will always be outward divisions in the ministry, and I avow myself the advocate and lover of these things. As I said last Sabbath, the thing called Sectarianism I do not disown but maintain.

But let us look to the inward. In John they are all in one boat, all fishing together, all dragging one net. Ah, brethren, this is what is really the fact. We do not see it, but all God's ministers are dragging one net, and all God's church is in one ship. Oh, I bless God for that sweet doctrine! It is no use striving after outward uniformity, we shall never see it. Neither the texture of the human mind nor the will of God require it. It is of no use to contend against the diversities which exist in the great visible church, I do not know that these differences are evils. They are the natural results of man's finite character, and must and will exist to the end of the chapter.

It is the unity of the Spirit, it is unity in Christ Jesus, it is unity in love to one another that God would have us regard. Let us learn this unity from the fact, that after all, though we may look as if we differed, yet if we be God's ministers, there is only one ministry, if we be God's church, there is only one church in the world, there is only one spouse of the Lord Jesus, there is only one fold and one shepherd. Though to our eyes it will always be so, two boats, or twenty boats, two nets, ay, fifty nets, yet to Him who sees all things better than we do, there is only one boat and one net, and they shall all who are taken in that one net be safely brought to shore.

3. Thirdly, there is another difference. In the first case, how many fish were caught? The text says, "a great multitude." In the second case, a great multitude are taken too, but they are all counted and numbered. "A hundred and fifty and three." Luke does not tell us how many were caught the first time, for there were some of them not worth the counting, but the second time you will perceive the exact number is recorded, "a hundred and fifty and three."

What was *Peter's* reason for counting them? We cannot tell. But I think I know why the Lord made him do it. It was to show us that though in the outward instrumentality of gathering the people into the church the number of the saved is to us a matter of which we know nothing definitely, yet secretly and invisibly the Lord has counted them even to the odd one, He knows well how many the Gospel net shall bring in.

See where the Word is preached what a great multitude are brought in! Thousands, tens of thousands are added to the different churches of Christ, and make a profession of their faith. It were impossible to reckon all over Christendom how many have been taken in the outward net of the visible church of Christ. But brethren, it is quite possible for it to be known of God how many shall be brought at last, and how many now are in the *invisible* church. He has counted them, foreordained their number, fixed them, settled them.

The number "one hundred and fifty and three" seems to me to represent a large definite number. They shall be in heaven a number that no man can number, for God's elect are not few, but they shall be a number whom God can number, for "The Lord knoweth them that are his." They shall be a number certain and fixed, which shall neither be diminished nor increased, but shall abide the same according to His purpose and will.

Now, *I*, as a preacher, have nothing to do with counting fish. My business is with the great multitude. Splash goes the net again! Oh, Master! You who have taught us to throw the net and bring in a multitude, guide into it the hundred and fifty and three.

4. Yet again, notice another difference. The fish that were taken the first time appear to have been of all sorts. The net was broken, and therefore, doubtless some of them got out again, there were some so little that they were not worth eating, and doubtless were thrown away. "They shall gather the good into vessels and throw the bad away." In the second case, the net was full of great fishes, they were all great fishes, all good for eating, all the one hundred and fifty-three were worth the keeping, there was not one little fellow to be thrown back into the deep again.

The first gives us the outward and visible effect of the ministry. We gather into Christ's church a great number. And there will always be in that number some that are not good, that are not really called of God. Sometimes we have church meetings in which we have to throw the bad away. We have many blissful meetings where it is gathering in the fish—and what big hauls of fish has God given to us! Glory

be to His name! But at other times we have to sit down and tell our fish over, and there are some who must be thrown away, neither God nor man can endure them.

Thus is it in the outward and visible church. Let no man be surprised if the tares grow up with the wheat—it is the order of things, it must be so. Let none of us wonder if there be wolves in sheep's clothing—it always will be so. There was a Judas among the twelve, there will be deceivers among us to the end of the chapter. Not so the invisible church—the church within the church—the holy of holies within the temple. In that there is none to throw away.

No, the Lord who brought them into the net, brought the right sort in, He did not bring one hypocrite or apostate, and having brought them in to the exact number of one hundred and fifty and three, they cannot one of them get out again, but they are kept in that net, for that net does not break, they are in the secret invisible church of Christ, and they cannot get out of it, let them do what they may. They may even give up their nominal profession, and thus get out of the visible church, but they cannot give up their secret possession, they cannot escape from the secret and invisible church, and they shall all be kept there till the net is dragged to land, and the whole one hundred and fifty-three saved.

5. Yet again, you notice in the first case the net broke, and in the second case it did not. Now, in the first case, in the visible church the net breaks. My brethren are always calling out “The net is broken!” No doubt it is a bad thing for nets to break, but you need not wonder at it. We cannot just now, when the net is full, stop to mend it, it will break. It is the necessary consequence of our being what we are that the net will break.

What mean you by this? Why, that instead of having some one denomination, we have twenty or thirty. The net is broken. I do not at all grieve over it. I believe it is what must be as long as we are flesh and blood. For until you get a set of perfect men, you will never have anything but these divisions. The net must break and will break.

But glory be to God, the net does not break after all in reality, for though the visible church may seem to be rent and torn to pieces, the invisible church is one. God's chosen, God's called, God's quickened, God's blood-bought, they are one in heart, and one in soul, and one in spirit. Though they may wear different names among men, yet they still wear before God their Father's name written on their foreheads, and they are and always must be one.

You perceive, brethren, that I do not advise you to strive for a nominal unity. The more you strive after that, the more divisions there will be. Certain brethren left many of our denominations, and formed, they said, a church that would not be a sect. All they did was to make a sect the most sectarian of sects—the most narrow and most bitter of cliques, though containing some of the best men, some of the best Christians, and the ablest writers of the times. You cannot make a visible uniformity, it is beyond your power—the net is broken.

There now! take care of the fish and leave the net alone, but still maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of perfectness. Take care that you are not a schismatic in your heart, that you hold no heresy in your soul, that you are one with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and in this you will soon see that the net is not broken, but that the saints are one.

Ah, I bless God that when once we get with God's people—it does not matter what they are—we soon find the net is not broken. There is many a godly clergymen of the Church of England with whom I commune with the greatest joy, and I have found the net was not broken, and in conversing with brethren of all denominations, some who from doctrine, some who from sentiment, stand wide as the poles asunder, I have still found and known that there was such a real and perfect harmony of heart that the net was not broken.

I do not believe that charity would ever have had such perfect work in Christ's church if it had not been for our being divided into tribes, like the twelve tribes of old. It is no charity for me to love a brother who thinks as I think—I cannot very well help it, but for me to love a dear brother who differs from me in some points, why there is exercise and room for my charity, and as God has left trials and

troubles to exercise faith, I believe He has left us in many doctrinal difficulties on purpose to exercise our love till the day shall come when we shall all grow to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus.

The net is not broken brethren, do not believe it, and when you read about this denomination and that, do not be grieved at these names and tribes, but rather thank God for them, say, that is the visible church, and the net is broken, but there is an invisible church where the net is not broken, where we are one in Christ, and must be one forever. There are several other points of difference, but I think we have hardly time to enlarge upon them. I will only hint at them.

In the first case, which is the visible church, you see the human weakness becomes the strongest point, there is the boat ready to sink, there is the net broken, there is the men all out of heart, frightened, amazed, and begging the Master to go away.

In the other case it is not so at all. There is human weakness, but still they are made strong enough. They have no strength to spare, as you perceive, but still they are strong enough, the net does not break, the ship goes slowly to land dragging the fish, and then lastly, Simon Peter pulls the fish to shore. Strong he must have been. They were just strong enough to get their fish to shore.

So in the visible church of Christ you will often have to mourn over human weakness, but in the invisible church, God will make His servants just strong enough—just strong enough to drag their fish to shore. The agencies, means, instrumentalities, shall have just sufficient force to land every elect soul in heaven, that God may be glorified.

Then notice, in the first case, in the visible church, they launched out into the deep. In the second case, it says they were not far from the shore, but a little way. So today our preaching seems to us to be going out into the great stormy deep after fish. We appear to have a long way to reach before we shall bring these precious souls to land. But in the sight of God we are not far from shore, and when a soul is saved, it is not far from heaven. To us there are years of temptation, and trial, and conflict, but to God, the Most High, it is finished—“it is done.” They are saved—they are not far from shore.

In the first case, the disciples had to forsake all and follow Christ. In the second, they sat down to feast with Him at the dainty banquet which He had spread. So in the visible church today we have to bear trial and self-denial for Christ, but glory be to God, the eye of faith perceives that we shall soon drag our net to land, and then the Master will say, “Come and dine,” and we shall sit down and feast in His presence, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.

III. The time is gone, and I close by NOTICING ONE AMONG MANY LESSONS WHICH THE TWO NARRATIVES IN COMMON SEEM TO TEACH.

In the first case, Christ was in the ship. Oh, blessed be God, Christ is in His church, though she launch out into the deep. In the second case, Christ was on the shore. Blessed be God, Christ is in heaven. He is not here, but He has risen, He has gone up on high for us. But whether He be in the church, or whether He be on the shore in heaven, *all our night's toiling shall, by His presence, have a rich reward.*

That is the lesson. Mother, will you learn it? You have been toiling long for your children. It has been night with you as yet. They give no evidence of grace, rather they give many signs of sin, and they grieve your spirit. Your night's toiling shall have an end, you shall at last cast the net on the right side of the ship.

Sunday school teacher, you have been diligently laboring long, and with but little fruit, be not discouraged, the Master will not let you work in vain, in due season you shall reap if you faint not, and as these disciples had a great sea harvest, so shall you have a harvest of souls.

Minister, you have been ploughing some barren rock, and as yet, no joyful sheaves have made your heart glad. You shall, doubtless, “Come again, rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you.”

And you, O church of God, travailing for souls, meeting daily in prayer, pleading with men that they will come to Christ, what if they are not saved yet? The morning comes, the night is far spent, and the Master Himself shall soon appear, and though He may not find faith on the earth, yet His advent shall bring to His church the success for which she has waited—such success that as a woman remembereth

no more her travail because a man is born into the world, so shall the church remember no more her toils, her efforts and her prayers, because Christ's kingdom has come, and His will is done on earth even as it is in heaven.

Work, dear friends! If there are any of you who are not working, *begin now*, if there are any of you not saved as yet, the Lord grant that when the Word is preached, you may be caught in it as in a net. We do throw it out once this morning, we hope to throw it again this evening.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved,” for “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.” Flee to Christ! Escape from the wrath to come! May the Spirit apply that word to you, and lead you to the place where high on Calvary with bleeding hands and feet, the Savior dies! One look at Him and you are saved. Look, sinner, and live! God save thee, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.