

THE DIVINE EVANGELIST: A PLEA FOR A NEW EVANGELISM.

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There is no more sad or serious aspect of modern religious life than the divorce between the great mass of the people and the churches of Christ. The problem as to "how to reach the masses" has been before us now for a generation and does not seem much nearer solution. Doubtless, however, we might learn much to help us in this direction, if we would return to a study of Jesus and His methods. The very first thing such a return would do for us would be to place upon every Christian disciple the grave responsibility of evangelism. It would be impossible to escape the conviction that Jesus expects His disciples to concern themselves in life *chiefly* with the making of other disciples. His own passion for "individuals" is patent to every reader of the Gospel. Is he sitting weary by the wayside well? He nevertheless has leisure and energy to devote His attention to the soul of the Samaritan woman! In doing so, He declares He has "meat to eat ye know not of". Does Nicodemus seek Him by night? Jesus has leisure and to spare to argue with a solitary soul. On the Jericho road, though surrounded by the crowd, He has eyes and thought mainly for Zacchæus! So one might go on instancing His interest in individuals—His immediate disciples, the woman with the issue of blood, the little group at Bethany, each one of which Jesus had evidently carefully studied, the Syrophenician woman—and who can tell how many more besides? Jesus did not rely upon great preachings, upon public demonstrations; He simply reached out to the humanity nearest Him, whether individual or group or crowd—but always He was at His work of winning souls to His Father. Here is a test of likeness to Christ indeed for our modern church membership!

It is a fair thing to claim that if one could form a register of all the relatives, business colleagues, friends, and acquaintances of all our church members of every denomination, one would have a very fair directory of the British Isles.

But if that is so, then *the church is reaching the masses*, only by the time the church is in touch it has evidently *lost its power of evangelism*. It is in touch only on the low level of worldly life and thought. These myriad points of contact over which should leap the burning thrill of the divine magnetism are not alive. In the day when the disciples of Christ share His evangelic passion, the Church will have reached the masses indeed, and the masses will not then be long in reaching the churches.

It is possible to mark certain outstanding features of the evangelism of our Lord.

THE INFINITE VALUE OF THE SOUL.

The most important characteristic is central to His gospel. *Jesus saw in each separate soul an absolute value*. He knew the infinite worth in His Father's sight of every individual. This was the reason He put forward again and again for His own interest in men. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repeneth."

One grand result of this estimate of the soul was that Jesus never approached men and women with any other motive than His deep and passionate love and respect for them. *His evangelism was entirely free from the taints of professionalism and ulterior motive*. We know all too well the evangelism that collects and counts souls as the Indian brave used to collect and count scalps. "So many conversions this week, this year!" It is this taint of ulterior purpose that has rightly caused a revulsion of feeling against evangelism in both the Church and the world.

The writer remembers a first interview with one who afterward became a close friend, who greeted him thus: "I suppose you want to do me good? Well, I don't want to be done good to!" One understands all the fierce resentment behind those words of a soul that thinks itself sought for some other reason than its own intrinsic worth and dignity. Any suggestion of patronage on the part of the saved is fatal to their evangelism.

It is not good enough to seek souls in order to build up a church or to increase one's own renown as a soul-winner, or to satisfy one's own sense of Christian duty. Only to the atmosphere of real genuine personal appreciation and love will souls respond. And they are right. Jesus loved the human soul in every individual well enough to die for it. His followers must learn the same pure passion before they can exert the same attraction.

"UP A TREE."

The story of Zacchæus illustrates powerfully a further fundamental characteristic of our Lord's method, namely, *His absolute faith in the power of every soul to respond.* No subject for evangelism could have been more unpromising than this tax-gatherer. He was just the type we all agree in these days to be hopeless. He was a "profiteer"! Yet with what perfect confidence in the better Zacchæus did Jesus approach him. Jesus knew that this man, like every other unsaved soul, was morally "up a tree". Zacchæus' inner life, to use our modern term, was a cruel dichotomy. A false and hated self posed before men as the extortioner and the grinder of the faces of the poor. In the deepest dungeon of the soul there lay an imprisoned and tortured Zacchæus whose protests ever and anon reverberated most uncomfortably through his "house of life". That better self is every soul's possession. There is a "light that lighteth every man coming into the world". Do we believe

that of one another? Do we believe it of the persons we meet in business or in social life? Do we realize it of our office companion, our fellow clerk or shopman, or of those in our own home? Do we resolutely believe it of the unlikeliest souls? Could we but see beneath all their surface objections to religion, beneath their indifference or antagonism, we should undoubtedly find each soul "up a tree". That quaint colloquialism indicates the deep embarrassment and perplexity which secretly beset every unsaved soul, however blatant may be its outward parade and swagger. In every soul estranged from God there lies deeply buried a conscience that speaks in behalf of the evangelist.

It is literally amazing what revelations of inward spiritual disturbance and pathetic moral wistfulness will break forth from a soul which is met in another by a strong belief in this buried better self. Often it is not necessary for the would-be evangelist to say a word or in any sense to force the situation. Simply to have that faith in others which Jesus so tenaciously held supplies magnetism enough to draw forth these deep confidences. If only all Christian people would set silent, spiritual siege to the souls about them with such a holy faith in their redeemability! Would not the atmosphere of all their intercourse be irresistibly charged with the evangel of Jesus?

ADVENTUROUS ATTACK.

Notice also the delightful and frank boldness of Jesus in His attack upon Zacchæus. There is great humor to be found in the story when closely studied. Driven by the deep hidden wistfulness of his soul to seek Jesus, Zacchæus fails in his attempt to get through the crowd because of his lack of stature. It is hardly likely the people would make way for such as he. But he is a man of resource and he remembers the sycamore tree. He

hurries on ahead of the crowd till he turns the bend in the road. I am sure there was a bend in the road just there, otherwise Zacchæus would never have found pluck enough to climb that tree. It would indeed have been funny to see this little rich man casting his eastern dignity to the winds and climbing that tree. At last, snugly hidden among the leaves, he feels secure from observation and is ready to enjoy a full view of Jesus. Along the road comes the Savior with the crowd and stops beneath the tree. Then, oh! consternation! Jesus looks up at the sycamore and calls, "Zacchæus! come down!" Fancy giving the whole show away like that! Yes, it is very funny! Yet if Jesus had said nothing but that it might have been tragic too, for Zacchæus might have resented being made the butt of the crowd's humor. Jesus, however, was never lacking in tact, and to His humorous exposure of Zacchæus He adds the high compliment, from a rabbi, of inviting Himself to the extortioner's house. By that simple turn of the situation Jesus found His way right into the heart of Zacchæus. That was all He cared for. Convention, the opinion of the crowd, His own reputation—these mattered nothing beside His concern for this struggling soul. There was nothing of that kind of cheap self-preservation about this divine Evangelist. Tact and boldness, an understanding of human nature and courageous frankness, a true psychology and a power of adventurous attack, there is the ideal combination for the soul-winner. Cannot the modern disciple of Jesus learn of Him these things? "He that is wise winneth souls." The Church today is woefully lacking in this power of attack and the reason is not far to seek. She is too sensitive—which means that her members are too sensitive—to the conventions of mere respectability, to the traditions and opinions of polite society. Where there is fear of men, passion can hardly thrive, and the modern church is singularly lacking in passion for the

one purpose for which her Lord called her into being. The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. His Church today seems to spend most of her strength in coddling the saints.

THE VALUES OF CONVERSION.

Yet it would require very few triumphs of a real Christian evangelism for the unique joy of it to kindle a blaze of enthusiasm.

If we dwelt with the mind of Jesus in this matter, He would convince us of the inestimable value of converting a soul genuinely to God. The evangelism of Jesus in the case of Zacchæus had far-reaching results. Think of the social value! Many a home sunk in undeserved poverty received fourfold for its cruel loss. Think of the home value! I do not know whether Zacchæus was married or not, but if so, I can imagine his wife singing perpetual hallelujahs to the name of Jesus for restoring the soul of her husband. Ah! the *home* value of that new life which comes to men in Christ! Think of the individual value! Zacchæus was henceforth a better companion to himself than he had ever been before. If we could once truly envisage these values of conversion we should esteem it the supreme privilege of our life here on earth to be able to befriend other souls in the behalf of Christ, to speak a word here and there for Him, to turn men from darkness to light. We should not rest till we had essayed the new evangelism to which Christ calls His disciples in these critical yet opportune days.