

From Confusion Unto Faith

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Scripture: Job 28:12-27; Luke 5:1-11.

Text: Luke 5:4 "Put out into the deep, and let your nets down for a draft."

One cannot fail to see in his daily observations that not only is there a condition of doubt, uncertainty and confusion in the world at large in regard to many of the most important problems of life, as well as to many of the less important ones, but also among people who profess to a high standard of faith, there is not less of mental and spiritual confusion than in the most avowedly doubting minds. People are not quite sure just how to feel towards the church, or the Bible, or Christ, sin, salvation, and hope for the future. Sometimes I think that even those who profess to have the deepest faith in regard to these things, really have no deep conviction at all, but rather are inclined either to ignore the problem, or to accept what someone else has said about them.

Do Not Think for Ourselves: Now to my mind all this confusion of thought comes to us simply because we do not chose to think for ourselves. The superstitious opinions that have made us rely on some authority outside of our own mind for our thoughts and knowledge, have so worked themselves into our nature, that we find it difficult to free ourselves from them, and think for ourselves. We hunt among our books and find these same opinions expressed as final truth, and we accept it without thinking, because we are still lulled into a thoughtless sleep, by the false idea of a final revelation or truth. Or we listen to the utterance of some great man, and accept his remarks and opinions as final truth, even though they are not true to our own experience. We still cling in form to the idea that a remark that appears in the Bible must be true literally, and give it special significance, even though it has every appearance of being false. Just think for a moment: What materials did these people have to think about over and

above what we have? Not only did they not have more than we, but they did have less. You and I have at our command all the experiences of our life, all the great facts of science in all its forms, all the records of history, all the wonders of the world. About these we can think, and from them we can draw our own conclusions. Yet even now we hardly chose to think for ourselves for fear our conclusions may differ from those of some other man. So instead of thinking out our problems for ourselves, and going back to history to find how other men have thought about similar problems, and by the light that they throw, and the perspective that they give, to substantiate, correct if need be, and confirm, our own conclusions, we attempt to transplant some system that was of value ages ago, and expect that system of ideas, or that idea to work today in precisely the same manner as it did then. We might as well try to take our carriage to some museum, and hitch to the skeleton of some mammoth, a species long since extinct, and expect it to haul our carriage for us. An opinion dug out of a book in some secluded library is no more likely to be true, than an opinion that we hear expressed by a living man. Distance lends enchantment in thoughts, as elsewhere, and we are altogether too willing to submit to that enchantment, and shirk the responsibility that rests upon us, a responsibility given us by God, of thinking out our own problems.

Evil of Shirking Responsibility: This tendency to shirk our responsibility of thinking, and accepting [sic] the thoughts of others as final truth, is the evil that has brought upon us such confusion as we see about us today in all social activities, but more especially in the world of religion. For centuries, people in general have not done their own religious thinking, but have relied, and have been taught to rely, upon the statements of a book, a creed, or a theologian. Consequently, that power to find God within our souls, the power that was in Jesus, has been stifled, and checked, and well-nigh destroyed, in the constant effort to find God without, in some person who had found God, such as Jesus, or some book, or some institution like the church. The result is that in our modern life, in which every activity is calling for us to think for ourselves, men are finding that, when they try to think for themselves about the great problems of man's relation to God, and the universe, their long period of degrading slavery to an external authority, has incapacitated them, and instead of thinking, they fear, and shirk from the task

as the liberated slave fears and shirks in face of his freedom, or the criminal, long imprisoned, fears to re-enter the activities of the world, lest he may again become a prisoner.

Miracle Discussed: I see this whole process clearly shown forth in this alleged miracle of Jesus and the fisherman that is a part of our scripture lesson, and I see there also that which will lead us out of this confusion unto a faith that is internal, enduring and eternal.

Let us try to picture to ourselves just the situation under which this alleged miracle took place. Jesus was a man who dared to think for himself, who found God, not in the law, not in the teachings of the Scribes and the Doctors, but in his own soul, and that which he found in his own soul, he saw also in the souls of others. At the time this miracle is said to have occurred, Jesus was sitting in a boat by the Sea of Galilee, trying to quicken the spiritual lives of those gathered about him and make them feel that inner faith, that God within their souls, even as he felt it. But as he was speaking to them he felt that they were under the enchantment of the law and the Scribes. He could detect the undercurrent of their thoughts as one can detect it today, as they said to themselves, "Yes! That seems true, but it is not what the law teaches, it is not what we learn from the Scribes." Jesus said to them, "Put out into the deep, and let your nets down for a draft." "If you are going to fish, you do not fish in here on the shore; you go out where the fish are. If you want truth, if you want to find God, do not go to the law which is simply the shore-line where the sea of life breaks on the land of form and tradition. If you want real truth, if you want to find the living God, put out into the deep of your own inner soul, and experience where the faith in the living God is to be found."

The Real Thought: That was the real thought, and situation out of which this alleged miracle was evolved. But as the parable, which taught a deep and far-reaching spiritual truth, was passed from mouth-to-mouth, and the force and freshness of the truth was lost in the¹ remoteness of the event, the parable became transformed by little touches here and there into that sickly conception of a

¹ There is a note above the text here, "start here and mark Sermon 1½"

miracle, a cold meaningless substitute for an infinitely precious truth taught by a parable. Simply because people feared to "put out into [the] deep," as Jesus had done, and told his listeners to do, a great truth was lost, and a beautiful parable was transformed into the record of a miracle which pictures Jesus in the light of a self-conscious egotist displaying his power before the eyes of the multitude. In this cold mechanical externalized form of a miracle we find it in the Gospels, but if we look beneath the form we can find the parable, and beneath the parable, we can find the truth.

Transforming A Simple Faith: In precisely the same way, the whole truth of Jesus' teaching, the consciousness of God in man's inner life, the spirit of God in man's soul, has passed through a process of externalization, and now we witness the spectacle of an alleged miracle, of a book, or a creed, or a church without the inner spiritual truth to support it. The simple faith of God in man's life has been transformed into a creed, the spirit of Christian fellowship has become the external church, and the power to "put out into the deep" and find God within the soul, has been lost.

Is that too strong a statement? Listen! One power that ought to come to us in our religious life is that high power of self-control, that enables our soul to rise above the disturbances of the body, the pains and sorrows of human life, and in the quiet serenity of a deep faith, an abiding sense of the power of God in our souls, majestically to walk through all the sorrows and pains of life. Could the church give that? Witness the phenomenal growth of a new body of people, whose fundamental tenant, when stripped of all its excessive peculiarities, is this one truth, the power given us of God to rise above our pains, and cares, and rest secure in a deep faith of the power within. That movement is a tremendous popular protest against the lifelessness of the church.

Truth Of Christian Fellowship: Again, our religious life ought to teach us the truth of Christian fellowship, teach us to feel that we are not living here like carnivorous animals, preying the one upon the other, regardless of human feelings and the Divine origin of a human soul. The early Christians, in the days when it was a disgrace to follow in Jesus' way, suffered ridicule, and bore the burden of persecution and death. But when Christianity

became the natural religion of the Roman world, the poor were left behind. Today that spirit that made the early Christian fellowship has been lost, and the prosperous, cultured and "religious" presume to hand out in a patronizing manner their wealth to establish missions. Their superior knowledge to instruct the downtrodden, and their narrow faith as the standard of religious belief. Does the spirit of Christian fellowship exist in the churches? Read your answer in the tremendous protest against the utter lack of fellowship that is being made under the general movement of Socialism. The very children themselves who nourished the church in its infancy are rising up in righteous judgement. You protest against the excesses of Socialism, and well you might; you say that the socialistic movement is utterly lacking in that spiritual power that alone makes life real and significant, but remember that the spiritual has been sapped from their lives by centuries of vain effort to find it in the external forms of creed and church. When I go to religious services and listen to prayers to Christ, and sit for a whole evening without hearing one word uttered to indicate that there is a God, or that we have anything to do with God or he with us, I sometimes think great portions of our so-called Christian people have entirely forgotten that that God exists. Their religion has degenerated into mere sentiment of hero worship.

No! The spirit of God in the life of Jesus and his followers, has been lost in the cold external mechanism of the church system. No lamenting over the lost power of the church, no attempt at pointing out the value of a truth once held, no artificial device for pumping oxygen into the inanimate body, no meaningless mass of phrases about the Divine source of the church, or the special power of the clergy will avail. There is only one thing that can be done. Quit the shore where the debris of the ages has accumulated in the form of creeds and dogmas and institutions spelled with capital letters, and put out into the deep, and find God for yourselves. He is not far from any one of us, being indeed that very power that is within us, that bids us think, that bids us reason, that bids us strive after the ideals that our thinking and reasoning powers formulate, that very power that bids us put out into the deep.

Conditions of Saving: Yes, we see that power already at work in this modern world, and already we are living under

conditions which in our industrial life, in our literary life, in our social life, in our political life demand thought, reflection, and reasoning for ourselves in all our activities. Our schools from the primary to the universities are stimulating us to more active thinking and to greater self-control. No teacher today thinks of propounding his facts and ideas as if they were final and ultimate truth, and no pupil is refused the right of asking, "Why?" or "What for?" Our political life demands of every voter that he shall think for himself, and what candidate for office would be so presuming as to say to the voters, "You vote thus and so." He appeals to them as men of intelligence, and endowed with powers that shall enable them to choose for themselves for whom they will vote. The very atmosphere in which we live is becoming permeated with that spirit that Jesus was trying to infuse into the people gathered about him at the Sea of Galilee when he said, "Put out into the deep and let your nets down for a draft." That same spirit is entering into our lives so deeply, that we are even applying it to our religious problems and are daring to think for ourselves. Slowly steadily, step-by-step that spirit which developed way back in the days of the Renaissance has been growing in breadth and power, doing its work fearlessly and honestly, putting out into the deep and finding its own truth in the life of experience. It has used that truth in destroying the cold mechanical church, in overthrowing the monarchical form of government, in breaking free from the conservatism that bound art, literature, and philosophy, and it is beginning to see in the parable of life that which Jesus taught, that God is to be found within and not without. Men have been to the church to find God, and found him not; they have been to the creed to find God, and found him not; they have been to the Bible to find God, and found him not. Then they dared to give up their vain quest, and put out into the deep of their own inner soul, their own experience, and like Sir Launfal they have returned only to find at home that for which they had been seeking abroad, the spirit of God that was in Jesus, and is in the soul of every human being.

Those men who have turned away from the church in their inability to find God there, are coming back, after finding God in their own life, and bringing God with them. Those men who could not find God in the Bible as an infallible Revelation, have found him within their own souls, and can turn to the Bible, and find there the records of men who

had also found God within. Men who could not find God in the Christ, a peculiar Divine mediator, and propitiation for the sin of humanity, have turned back to the pages of the New Testament after they had found God in their own souls, and discovered the simple Jesus of Nazareth, filled to overflowing with the spirit of God in his soul. Men who have turned away from the sinning selfish humanity, despairing of even finding God there, have come back humble and penitent to find that in every human soul there is the Divine, if one but finds it in himself first.

Safe Beyond the Breakers: We have put out from the shore, and are now safe beyond the breakers, where we can put down our nets for a draft. We have looked beneath the recorded miracle, to find the hidden parable, we have looked beneath the parable and found the truth that the parable teaches. Following that teaching we have left the church as an institution resting upon special Divine authority, and the Bible, and Christ as mediator, and have found God in our own inner souls, speaking to us in high thought, and noble aspirations. With God within, we have looked about us and found him speaking to us in a thousand tongues, in the Bible, in all lofty literature, in Jesus, and all holy men. Out of the confusion of our thoughts, our doubts, our degrading acceptance of another's word, we are coming into that eternal faith in the God within, and the God without, that faith that Jesus had.

If you fail to find God, if your mind is confused, if every claim in behalf of the eternal reality of the spiritual life seems to you false and meaningless, mechanical and lifeless, have the courage to thrust aside all the doctrines, and teachings of the past, all the books and churches, all the confusion of theology, and look into your own inner Holy of Holies, and ask, "Whence cometh this soul of mine, with its power of thought, and reason, whence cometh this eternal longing for something higher and better, whence cometh this sting of remorse that rises up to judge me for an act of meanness, whence cometh this hope for the future? Ah! That is the spirit of God in the soul of man. We do not need miracles to prove that, nor inspired books, nor sacramentally ordained clergy. Every noble impulse of our life, every experience goes to confirm it, and all, all creation seems to come rushing to us with the glad tidings when once we have dared to put out into the deep and let down our nets for a draft. Out of the confusion of the present we are moving unto a Faith that is

enduring and eternal, leaving behind us the shells of
bygone conceptions, and entering into the inner spiritual
truth of life.