

THE CALL OF THE UPPER ROAD

Matthew 4:19

"And He saith unto them, Follow me" (Matthew 4:19).

There are two divergent roads. One is a low road, the road of sin and selfishness. The other is a high road, the road of goodness and service.

Lying out before you is a road that leads downward and a road that leads upward. Which road are you going to travel?

Let me urge you to plant your feet on the upper road and stay on that road until life's little day is done. The upper road is the road on which Christ walks. It is the road of the noble life, true happiness and useful service. Many have stood at the forks of these roads. Some took the low road and went down into uselessness, sorrow and oblivion. Others took the upper road and lived beautiful and useful lives, and were a blessing to others and a joy to God.

One day the Lord Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, and there He saw Simon Peter and Andrew fishing. To these plain fishermen, Christ said: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." They straightway left everything that they had and followed Christ on the upper road. Their names were written in the Bible and we remember them today because they made the wise decision to follow Christ on the upper road.

When Peter first heard that call of Christ he was a comparatively young man. He was growing restless at the thought of spending his lifetime dragging nets. The call of the Lord struck home to that slumbering and uneasy discontent. Following Christ was a loftier and noblier service than he could hope for on the Sea of Galilee.

In like manner the Lord Jesus Christ calls to the young people today and says to them, "Follow me and I will make you..." He wants to make you into the finest and most useful people that you are capable of being. He wants you to walk with Him on the upper road of true service and true happiness.

The road that you take determines your character and your achievements. Look at the difference between Jesus Christ and Napoleon Bonaparte. The former lived to serve, and the latter lived to kill and destroy. Christ had the highest ideals and Napoleon had the lowest. The ambition of Christ was to save and serve, whereas the ambition of Napoleon was to rule and ruin. One took the upper road and will be forever remembered as the world's greatest benefactor, whereas the other took the lower road and will ever be remembered as one of the world's greatest failures. Which road are you going to take?

I. The Upper Road Is The Road Of Cleanliness.

The lower road is filled with the filth of this world. The upper road is a clean road, on which the Lord Jesus Christ walks. Alvin York was declared by General Pershing to be the greatest hero of World War I. It took great courage for York to rush in and single-handedly capture a great company of the enemy. Charles Lindbergh was the first man to make a solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean. It took great courage for him to launch that long, lonesome flight in a small and weak airplane. It takes real courage to accomplish the great feats of life, but it takes more courage to face life day-by-day and always to live according to the highest and best ideals.

When Martin Luther was being urged to recant and go back into the Roman Catholic Church, he said, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me." As you go out into the world many voices will plead with you to give up the highest and best things. They will say to you, "Give up your old faith. Give up your high ideals. Come into the world and enjoy its pleasures. Come and walk the lower road with us. May God help you say with Luther, "God help me, I must stand for the right."

I have seen many fine young men from good Christian homes go to college or the university. They had been brought up in the right way. They had bright prospects but, in the institution of higher learning, they took the lower road. They chose the wrong companions and launched out upon the primrose path. Any sissy can do that sort of thing, but it takes a real red-blooded he-man to overcome the temptations of daily life and to walk down the road of cleanliness and purity. If any one is going to stay clean and walk the upper road, he will need God's help. One can't win alone. Ask God to help you to keep clean, and to enable you to walk the upper road victoriously.

II. The Upper Road Is The Road Of Wisdom.

In his dream, Solomon chose wisdom and God commended him for his choice. Later on we hear him say, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7). Learn something and be somebody.

If you are to have wisdom, you must be dominated by the Master Mind, even the mind of Christ Himself. John the Baptist was a great man and did many wonderful things. Christ Jesus said he was the greatest man born of a woman. But John the Baptist was dominated by the Lord Jesus. Paul was a great man and he left a trail of glory in the world, but Paul was dominated by the mind of Christ. Martin Luther was a great man, courageous enough to defy all the power of a corrupt state church, but he was dominated by the mind of Christ. John Calvin was a great man. When someone sent him the message that he would be shot when he entered a certain pulpit, he replied that he would be glad to die on the spot for the Lord Jesus. He was a courageous man but he was dominated by the mind of Christ. John Knox was a great man. The Queen of England feared him more than she did great armies, but he was dominated by the mind of Christ. Gladstone was a mighty intellect, but Christ dominated him. As an orator and preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon soared like an eagle and sang like a lark, but his mind was dominated by the mind of Christ. The greatest minds of this world have been subject to the great mind of the Master.

Every pathway of study and research will lead to Christ if you will only follow the pathway of truth.

In the laboratory you can see the divine plan for each minute plant and animal. Through the telescope you can see a star far, far away, and you come to realize something of the greatness of God. You can study astronomy and gaze at the glory of the Lord in the Milky Way. You can study psychology and learn how the mind works. What does all of this mean? It is simply the age-old effort of man to track the footprints of the Almighty. All the wonders of earth will lead us to God, if we will only permit them to do so.

Emerson and Longfellow were intimate friends. In the latter years of Emerson's life, his mind began to fail. He attended Longfellow's funeral and looking down into the great poet's face, he said, "This was a lovely soul, but I forget his name." His mind was in ruins. That is a great tragedy, but it is a greater tragedy to have a mind which is not ruled by the mind of Christ. The upper road is the road of wisdom.

III. The Upper Road Is The Road Of Usefulness.

Christ said that one must lose life to find it. They crucified Him, but they could not kill the principles and ideals which He taught.

An old man visited his son, who was a physician, and the young man complained that he was not doing well in his practice. One day the father accompanied him to a free clinic and saw him help twenty-five unfortunate people. Later the father said to the son, "I thought you said that you were not getting along so well. If I could help twenty-five people in a month, I would surely feel that my life was counting for something good." The son replied, "But there is no money in it." And the father wisely said, "There may not be any money in it, but what is money compared to service to your fellowman?"

John the Baptist was called "A burning and a shining light." He did not shine until he had burned. Unless we burn, we can never shine. We ought to be willing to burn for Christ in order that we might shine for Him. The upper road is a road of usefulness, but our usefulness is always determined by our nearness to Christ.

Years ago in a Pennsylvania town a great oil refinery was located right next to a small machine shop. Much of the power in the oil refinery was going to waste. The owner of the small shop asked the owner of the oil refinery if he would permit him to hitch on to some of this power, which was going to waste. This permission was given and immediately the small shop began to grow. Now there are five factories where the small shop formerly stood. Your power is small also, but if you will hitch your weakness to the great power of Christ, your life will be stronger and more useful and you will be able to make a great contribution to the world.

Many lives have been transformed on the upper road. Matthew was a despised and greedy tax collector, but when he was changed by the Master he wrote the gospel which bears his name. Peter was a blundering, cursing fisherman, who lied and swore his way through the world, but when he was transformed by the Saviour, he became a conqueror for Christ. John Bunyan was a swearing tinker, but when he was transformed by the power of Christ he preached the gospel most effectively. For this they threw him in jail, but he wrote a book which crawled out through the bars of that prison and knocked upon more doors and touched more lives for Christ than any book yet written by a human being.

John B. Gough was a weak drunkard. He was bankrupt in purse and in character, but when he was transformed by the touch of Christ, he led thousands to the Saviour and sobriety.

Jane Adams was a frivolous society woman, but when she was transformed by the Saviour, she devoted her life to the poor and has been named one of America's greatest women.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell was a young medical doctor who wanted to settle down in a lucrative London practice, but when he was made over by Christ, he went out to give his life away for fisherfolk on the frozen coasts of Labrador, and for this the world calls him great. Humanity is always greatly blessed by those men and women who walk the upper road with Christ.

IV. The Upper Road Is The Road Of Satisfaction.

I want to mention two Bible characters who sought satisfaction on the lower road. The Old Testament tells us about one of them and the New Testament tells us about the other. Solomon ran the whole gamut of wealth and wisdom and works and wine and women. He came down to the end of the way broken in heart and disappointed in spirit. He cried out, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." One day a rich young ruler came to Christ. This young man had wealth, friends, morality, and earnestness, and he kept the law. But he came to the Lord Jesus and said in substance, "Lord I am not satisfied, What must I do?" "Good Master what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Neither Solomon nor this rich young ruler found any satisfaction on the lower road. No man ever finds satisfaction on that road.

Where can a man find satisfaction and happiness? Neither is to be found in riches. One day someone asked a wealthy man, "Does your wealth make you happy?" The man answered, "I only wish that it did, I know many people who would be happy if money could produce happiness."

You will not find a lasting satisfaction and happiness in fame, for at the age of thirty-two, Alexander the Great had conquered the known world. Not being satisfied with his conquest, he wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. You will not find lasting satisfaction in sinful pleasure. The pleasures of life are but for a season. Lasting pleasure is found only if we live a good life and walk on the upper road of service for Christ, our Lord.

Paul said that he counted all things but loss for the excellency of knowing Christ and following Him. He had found real satisfaction. You and I must find it in the same way. The self-seeker is never happy. Christ said that the man who wants to find his life must lose it for His sake. Some years ago the Salvation Army wanted to send a Christmas message to its people around the world. There was but just one word in that message, the word "Others." The life of Christ was the most useful life that was ever lived, and that was because it was a life lived for others.

Men fail to find satisfaction and happiness today because they are building their lives on faltering foundations. A woman one day looked out her window and saw a mother bird building her nest under a rose bush. "Ah, pretty creature," said the woman, "you are building your nest too low, you are risking the lives of the little ones you hope to have someday." Before long there were four little blue eggs in the nest, and then sometime later there were four little blue birds in the nest, chirping and begging the mother to bring them their food. One day the woman heard a cry of distress from outside the window. She ran to the window and looking out saw that a snake had crawled up to the nest and was devouring the last of the little birds, while the brokenhearted mother bird fluttered about in distraction. Her folly was that she built her nest too low. That can be your folly, too. If you build your life on worldly foundations, you will fail to find satisfaction. Let the Lord Jesus Christ be the foundation of your life. Walk with Him on the upper road and you will certainly find it to be a road of satisfaction.

The main thing in life is not to get an education, or to carve out a great career, but to get yourself into the right relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. With Him as your Saviour, you are ready for life, ready for death and ready for eternity. If you travel the upper road with Christ, let everything you do be done for His approval and glory. Then life will be sweeter and better for you. You will thereby make a real contribution to the world in which you live, and at the end of the way you will hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."