

BEING WHAT YOU OUGHT TO BE

"Thou artThou shalt be." John 1:42

These fragments of a sentence are the words of our Lord. They are addressed to Simon Peter. Occasion is first meeting of Master with this rough fisherman who was destined to figure so prominently in the company of the apostles and in the immensely critical and history-shaping affairs of the early Church. Read 1:41-42.

Thou art! Thou shalt be! Actual and the possible! Realism and idealism! What is and what ought to be! And between two, Lord Jesus, effect of Whose presence is like that of mighty bridge flung across a vast and forbidding chasm.

Jesus looked at Simon and read him to the depths. Read his hot and hasty nature. Saw impulse that was strong and energy that was immense, but withal selfishness, cowardice, instability, weakness. And seeing it all, He spoke, as no mere man could have spoken, spoke with unerring accuracy and authoritative prophecy, spoke not only as One Who can perfectly diagnose but Who can quite as perfectly deliver: text. "Thou art Simon, son of Jona, but thou shalt become the man of rock. Thou are Simon, rash, presumptuous, self-confident, a streak of treachery in thy make-up, but I propose to make thee anew. Unstable as water thou art; fine and firm as the granite texture of a stone thou shalt be. Follow Me, I will make thee a fisher of men and a pillar in the church of the living God. With illumined mind thou shalt discern and with willing lips thou shalt yet confess the deity of My person. Fully converted and filled with the Spirit of God, thou shalt be the strength of thy brethren." Christ changed Simon's name:

1. As a sign of His taking entire possession of him.
2. As a promise of transforming power.
3. As a prophecy of his future office and importance in the church.

Such, in effect, was Christ's message of transforming grace to Simon Peter. It is still His message to all Simons everywhere who will never arise out of the tyranny of their past failures and the paralysis of their present defeats save as they yield themselves to the renewing and purifying energies of the redeeming God. Thou art..... Thou shalt be!

I. From Christ's Standpoint What Did It Mean?

1. Simon was worth saving and capable of being saved.

Not because of his worthiness, but because of his worth

Christ set about to redeem him. Beneath the failure and fickleness, the selfishness and sin, there was that in the essential worth of this rustic fisherman which appealed to the Saviour and Saver of souls. Thou shalt be! Others may say, "It never can be. We know too well." Not so Jesus. He believes in the recoverability of the worst cases, the most difficult ones. He restates for us in glowing terms of hope and healing this broken, baffled, beaten-down thing we call life. Sin is real but it is not incurable or unconquerable. Men are lost but they are at once worth saving and capable of being saved -- saved from sin and prepared for every good work. Jesus reads man's significance not in the wickedness and wretchedness in which man languishes but in the righteousness and godliness to which he may be lifted.

Whatever other folks may believe about you, or whatever other folks may believe about you, or whatever you may believe about yourself, the Lord Jesus Christ believes in the glorious possibility that you -- defeated you, soiled, enslaved, proud, self-centered you -- may be saved, cleansed from all unrighteousness and clothed with the beauty of holiness and the beneficence of service.

2. He believes in the omnipotence, the all-sufficiency, of the grace and power of God. "Thou shalt be," taken in its full sweep, implies all the resources of the Almighty God as expressed and released in the atoning death of our Lord, in the present active ministry of the Holy Spirit and in the effectual enlightenment of the Holy Scriptures.

II. Important That We Candidly and Humbly Accept the Verdict of What We Are. Read John 1:17.

Grace and truth! Grace, which says, "Thou shalt be," and truth, which says, "Thou art." To shun the truth is to miss the grace. Do not blink the truth of what thou art. Nothing can be gained, everything may be lost, by deception or by denial. Thou art. Face up squarely to the light of that searching judgment. Thou art ---- You fill it in according to the disclosure and conviction the Spirit of God brings to your heart. Thou art a sinner, a backslider, a covenant-breaker; thou art disobedient, rebellious, unholy; thou art a moralist, a formalist, a Nicodemus, full of self-righteousness, empty of the life and mind of Christ; thou art a true believer, it may be, but one in whom the Holy Spirit is not given full possession and control.

To the struggling patriarch, Jacob, by the brook Jabbok, the wrestling angel of God put the question straight: "What is thy name?" And Jacob, though he had met God before and had made covenant with Him, must now in the crisis-hour of full yielding, the death-hour of the self-life, confess to what he inwardly and perversely is. He must say "Jacob," which is being interpreted, "supplanter," "Trickster," "deceiver." Then comes the voice of the divine Messenger: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel." Israel -- a prince of God! Truth had to say "Jacob" before grace could say "Israel." Thou art Thou shalt be.

III. Significance of test in relation to ourselves.

1. It should stimulate hope.

Where sin ^{abounds} ~~abound~~ grace shall ^{more} ~~exceedingly~~. Whatever the misguided, miss-happen, miserable thing your Christless life has come to be, the divine hand of the Son of God undertakes to reshape it, redeem it, make it strong and glorious. Here is a promise all a-throb and a-thrill with hope. Thou shalt be! And hope is a very great thing. It has in it elements of desire, expectation and patience.

John Newton, author of "Amazing Grace" and "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds," dictated his ~~own~~ epitaph. It is a striking summary of his life, and reads: John Newton, Clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Preserved, Restored, Pardoned, and appointed to Preach the Faith he had so long laboured to destroy.

The story of his conversion is one of the great epics of grace. At the age of 23, having drunk dregs of vilest sins, young Newton took ship from Africa for his native England. Plunged into a terrific storm, the battered vessel began to take water into its hold. The pumps had to be manned. Hurrying to take his turn, Newton said to the captain, "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy upon us." His own words startled him. For the first time in years his thoughts turned to God in a serious way and he considered the interests of his soul. That evening he began to seek the face of God. At first he seemed to get nowhere. He said, "I would not utter the prayer of faith. I could not draw near to a reconciled God and call Him Father." On he struggled. Then came the light.

These are his own words: "In the gospel I saw at least a peradventure of hope; but on every side I was surrounded with black, unfathomable despair." In following the gleam of that peradventure of hope, saving faith was born in his breast and on that 10th day of March 1748, John Newton became a new creature in Christ Jesus. Though he sleeps in death, the grace of which he wrote and sang lives on deathlessly and works on transformingly:

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound --
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath bro't me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun."

2. It should enlist our cooperation.

Heavy-hearted over the knowledge of what we have been and are, but quickened with the hope of a new life and a new day, it becomes our imperatively necessary business to put ourselves in the hands of Christ. When Jesus said to Simon, "Thou shalt be Peter," He was laying down no arbitrary decree that should override Peter's will and decision in the matter. "Thou shalt be," but, impliedly, there are terms. It is on condition of your consent, on condition that you cleave to Me and follow Me.

Would you taste the joys of a new life, forgiven of God and in vital fellowship with Christ? Then give over your will and give up your unbelief. Would you come to know the blessed secret of the flood-tide life, the life of purity, power, and praise; would you receive the released energies of the Spirit of God? Then, by a definite act of unreserved and unrestricted consecration, embrace your inheritance "among them that are sanctified by faith."

3. It should produce a witness.

Can Jesus Christ make good? That sounds almost irreverent. Let no one have a fear. Can He make good? Look at His witnesses. Look at that multitude which no man can number, who sing: "Unto Him Who loved us, and loosed us from our sins in His Own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father." Christ proves His power by producing transformed lives. "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me."

It is a great thing to have an ideal to ennoble our facts; but it is even more to have a fact to prove our ideals. It is the susperbly commanding distinction of Jesus Christ that He offers that very thing. He not only lifts ideals before us, but offers in Himself the power for their realization in fact.

Was it not so with this man Simon? Thou shalt be Peter— Peter, My witness; Peter, following Me earnestly, though denying Me shamefully, healed nevertheless of his backsliding; Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, preaching a sermon so pungent and convicting that 3,000 souls are converted; Christ-witnessing, Christ-exalting Peter, declaring to unfriendly magistrates who sought to seal his lips with dire threatenings, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard;" Peter, testifying to the goodness of God in bestowing the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles as well as upon Jews; Peter, writing years later to scattered, persecuted Christians, writing probably with chains on his wrists but certainly with doxologies in his soul: Quote I Peter 1:3-9.

Shall we not unite in offering all praise to the Christ who can take our possibilities and convert them into actualities? By His grace we can be what we ought to be!