
AT THY WORD

A SERMON DELIVERED ON APRIL 16, 1882,
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“And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.”
— Luke 5:5.

How very much may simple obedience partake of the sublime! Peter went to catch up the net, and let it down into the sea, and he said as naturally as possible, “At thy word I will let down the net”; but he was there and then appealing to one of the grandest principles which rules among intelligent beings, and to the strongest force which sways the universe:— “At thy word.” Great God, it is “at thy word” that seraphs fly and cherubs bow! Your angels which excel in strength are obedient to the voice of thy word. “At thy word” space and time first came into existence, and all other things that are. “At thy word,”— here is the cause of causes, the beginning of the creation of God. “By the word of the Lord were the heavens and earth made.” When the earth was formless and dark, thy voice, O Lord, was heard, saying, “Let there be light,” and “at thy word” light leaped forth. “At thy word” day and night took up their places, and “at thy word” the waters were divided from the waters by the firmament of heaven. “At thy word” the dry land appeared, and the seas retired to their channels. “At thy word” the globe was covered over with green, and vegetable life began. “At thy word” appeared the sun and moon and stars, “for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.” “At thy word” the living creatures filled the sea, and air, and land, and man at last appeared. Of all this we are well assured, for by faith we know that the worlds were framed by the word of God. Acting in conformity with the word of our Lord we feel ourselves to be in order with all the forces of the universe, travelling on the main track of all

real existence. Is not this a marvelous condition, even though it be seen in the common deeds of our everyday life?

It is not in creation alone that the word of the Lord is supreme, but in providence too its majestic power is manifested, for the Lord upholds all things by the word of his power. Snow and vapour and stormy wind are all fulfilling his word. His word runs very swiftly. When frost binds up the life-floods of the year the Lord sends forth his word and melts them. Nature abides and moves by the word of the Lord. So, too, all matters of fact and history are beneath the supreme word. Jehovah stands at the centre of all things, as Lord of all he abides at the saluting-point, and all the events of the ages come marching by at his word, bowing to his sovereign will. "At thy word," O God, kingdoms arise and empires flourish: "at thy word," races of men become dominant, and tread down their fellows: "at thy word" dynasties die, kingdoms crumble, mighty cities become a wilderness, and armies of men melt away like the hoarfrost of the morning. Despite the sin of man and the rage of devils, there is a sublime sense in which all things from the beginning, since Adam crossed the threshold of Eden even until now, have happened according to the purpose and will of the Lord of hosts. Prophecy speaks, and history writes her pages, "at thy word," O Lord.

It is wonderful to think of the fisherman of Galilee letting down his net in perfect agreement with all the arrangements of the ages. His net obeys the law of nature. His hand consciously does what Arcturus and Orion are doing without thought. "At thy word," says Peter, as he promptly obeys, as do the seas and stars and winds and worlds. It is glorious to be keeping step with the marchings of the armies of the King of kings.

There is another way of working out this thought. "At thy word" has been the password of all good men from the beginning until now. Saints have acted upon these three words and found their marching orders in them. An ark is built on dry land, and the jeering crowd gather about the aged patriarch, laughing at him; but he is not ashamed, for lifting his face to heaven he says, "I have built this great vessel, O Jehovah, at thy word." Abraham leaves the place of his childhood, leaves his family, and goes with Sarah to a land of which he knows nothing, crossing the broad Euphrates,

and entering upon a country possessed by the Canaanite, in which he roams as a stranger and a sojourner all his days. He dwells in tents with Isaac and Jacob. If any scoff at him for renouncing the comforts of settled life he lifts also his calm face to heaven and smilingly answers to the Lord, "It is at thy word." Ay, and even when his brow is furrowed, and the hot tear is ready to force itself from beneath the patriarch's eyelid, as he lifts his hand with the knife to stab Isaac to the heart, if any charge him with murder, or think him mad, he lifts the same placid face towards the majesty of the Most High and says, "It is at thy word." At that word he joyfully sheathes the sacrificial knife, for he has proved his willingness to go to the utmost at the word of the Lord his God. If I were to introduce you to a thousand of the faithful ones who have shown the obedience of faith, in every case they would justify their acts by telling you that they did them "at God's word." Moses lifts his rod in the presence of the haughty Pharaoh, "at thy word," great God! Nor does he lift that rod in vain at Jehovah's word, for thick and heavy fall the plagues upon the children of Ham. They are made to know that God's word does not return to him void, but fulfills his purpose, whether it be of threatening or of promise. See Moses lead the people out of Egypt, the whole host in its myriads! Mark how he has brought them to the Red Sea, where the wilderness shuts them in. The heights frown on either side, and the rattle of Egypt's war-chariots is behind. How did Moses come so to play the fool and bring them here? Were there no graves in Egypt that he brought them out to die on the Red Sea shore? The answer of Moses is the quiet reflection that he did it at Jehovah's word, and God justifies that word, for the sea opens wide a highway for the elect of God, and they march joyfully through, and on the other side they sing unto the Lord who has triumphed gloriously. If in after days you find Joshua marching around Jericho, and not assailing it with battering rams, but only with one great blast of trumpets, his reason is that God has spoken to him by his word. And so right on, for time would fail me to speak of Samson, and Jephthah, and Barak: these men did what they did at God's word; and doing it, the Lord was with them. Is it bringing things down from the sublime to the ridiculous to talk of Peter and the net which he casts over the side of his little boat? Oh, no. We are ourselves ridiculous when we do not make our own lives sublime by the obedience of faith.

Certainly, there may be as much sublimity in casting a net as in building an ark, lifting a rod, or sounding a ram's horn; and it is clear that if it be done in faith, the simplest action of life may be sublimely great. The flash of the wave as it covers Peter's net may be as sublime before the Lord as the glory of the Red Sea billow when it returned in its strength. God who sees a world in a drop sees wonders in the smallest act of faith. Do not, I pray you, think that sublimity lies in masses, to be measured by a scale, so that a mile shall be sublime and an inch shall be absurd. We measure not morals and spirituals by rods and chains. The common act of fishing at Christ's word links Peter with all the principalities, and powers, and forces which in all ages have known this as their only law—"He spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." We too shall have fellowship with the sublime if we know how to be perfectly obedient to the word of the Lord.

This ought to be the rule of all Christians for the whole of their lives—"At thy word." This should direct us in the church and in the world; it should guide us in our spiritual beliefs and in our secular acts, "At thy word." I wish it were so. We hear boastings that the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants. It is a mere boast. Few Protestants can honestly repeat the assertion. They have other books to which they pay deference, and other rules, and other guides, beyond, and above, and even in opposition to, the one Word of God. It ought not to be so. The power of the church and the power of the individual to please God shall never be fully known till we get back to the simple yet sublime rule of our text, "At thy word."

I am just going to hammer upon that phrase this morning as God shall help me: "At thy word." This rule has many applications. First, I shall somewhat repeat myself by saying that it ought to apply to the affairs of ordinary life; secondly, it should apply to matters of spiritual profiting; and thirdly, and here I shall enlarge, it ought to find its chief application in our great life business, which is being fishers of men.

I. "At thy word" should apply TO ALL THE AFFAIRS OF ORDINARY LIFE. I mean, first, as to continuance in honest industry. "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." Many a man in the

present trying crisis is half ready to throw up his work, and run away from his business, because he has toiled all night and taken nothing. Truly, the financial darkness has lasted long, and does not yet yield to the dawning, but yet Christians must not murmur or leave their posts. Oh tried ones, continue to be diligent in your business, still provide things honest in the sight of all men. Labour on in hope. Say just as Peter did, “Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.” “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it,” you know that truth full well; know this also, that the Lord will not forsake his people. Your best endeavours will not of themselves bring you prosperity; still, do not relax those endeavours. As God’s word to you is to conduct yourselves like men, and be strong, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and stand fast. Throw not away your shield, cast not away your confidence, but stand steadily in your rank till the tide of battle turns. God has placed you where you are, move not till his providence calls you. Do not run before the cloud. So go to your work tomorrow morning, and don’t let despondency drive you to anything that is rash or unseemly. Say, “Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.”

If I am speaking to those who are out of work just now, searching for some place where they can provide bread for themselves and for their families, as is their duty, let them hear, and ponder. If any man does not do his best to provide for his own household he comes not under a gospel blessing, but he is said to be worse than a heathen man and a publican—it is the duty of us all to labour with our hands that which is good, that we may have to give to the needy as well as to those dependent on us. If after having gone about this city till your feet are blistered you can find nothing to do, do not sit at home next Monday sulkily saying, “I will not try again.” Apply my text to this painful trial, and yet again go forth in hope, saying with Peter, “We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.” Let men see that a Christian is not readily driven to despair: no, let them see that when the yoke is made more heavy the Lord has a secret way of strengthening the backs of his children to bear their burdens. If the Holy Spirit shall make you calmly resolute, you will honour God much more by your happy perseverance than the talkative by his fine speeches, or the formalist by his outward show. Common life is

the true place in which to prove the truth of godliness and bring glory to God. Not by doing extraordinary works, but by the piety of ordinary life is the Christian known and his religion honoured. At God's word hold on even to the end. "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

It may be, too, that you have been endeavouring in your daily life to acquire skill in your business, and you have not succeeded, or you have tried to acquire more knowledge, so that you could better fulfil your vocation, but thus far you have not prospered as you could wish. Do not, therefore, cease from your efforts. Christians must never be idlers. Our Lord Jesus would never have it said that his disciples are a sort of cowards who, if they do not succeed the first time, will never try again. We are to be patterns of all the moral virtues as well as of the spiritual graces: therefore, at the bidding of the Lord, work on with mind and hand, and look to him for the blessing. "At his word" let down the net once more: he may intend largely to bless you when by trial you have been prepared to bear the blessing.

This will apply very closely to those who are labouring hard in the training of children. It may be that with your own children you may not have succeeded yet: the boy's spirit may still be wild and proud, and the girl may not yet have yielded to obedience and submission. Or you may be working in the Sunday School, or in the day-school, trying to impart knowledge, and to fashion the youthful mind right, and you may have been baffled; but if it is your business to teach, do not be overcome. Stand to your work as though you heard Jesus say, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men." Earnestly, then, at his word again let down the net.

I counsel you, dear friends, in everything to which you set your hands, if it be a good thing, do it with all your might; and if it be not a good thing, have nothing to do with it. It may be possible that you are called to teach the age some moral truth. In most generations individuals have been called to carry out reforms, and to promote progress. You are bound to love your neighbour as yourself, therefore as you have opportunity do good unto

all men. If you have tried, and thus far have not won a hearing, do not give up your point; if it is a good thing, and you are a Christian man, never let it be said that you were afraid or ashamed. I admire in Palissy the potter, not only his Christianity, which could not be overcome by persecution, but his perseverance in his own business of making pottery. His last farthing and his last breath would have gone in discovering a glaze, or bringing out a colour. I love to see such men believers. I should not like to see our Lord followed by a set of cowards who could not fight the common battles of life: how should such as these become worthy of the lordlier chivalry which wrestles with spiritual wickedness in high places? It is for us to be bravest among the brave in the plains of common life, that when we are summoned to higher fields, where still greater deeds are needed, we may go there trained for the higher service.

Does it seem to you to be a little out of place to be talking like this from the pulpit? I do not think so. I notice how in the Old Testament we are told of the sheep and the cattle, and the fields and the harvests of good men; and these had to do with their religion. I notice how the prudent woman according to Solomon looked well to her household; and I observe that we have in the Bible a book of Proverbs, and another called Ecclesiastes, with little spiritual teaching in them, but a great deal of good, sound, practical common sense. It is evident to me that the Lord intends that our faith should not be penned up in a pew, but should be seen in every walk of life. The great principle of my text fell from the lips of a working man, and to the working man I return it: it was connected with a net and a boat, the implements of his labour, and with these common things I would link it; and I would say to all who serve the Lord, in this present evil world,— in the name of God, if you have anything to do, do not be so desponding and despairing as to cease from it, but, according to his word, once more go forward in your honest endeavours, and, like Peter, say, “I will let down the net.” This may prove a word in season to some who are weary of the hardness of the times. I shall rejoice if it strengthens an arm or cheers a heart. Have faith in God, my tried brethren. “Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

II. IN MATTERS OF SPIRITUAL PROFITING we must at the word of Christ let down the net again. I put this, first, to those who have been up to this Tabernacle a great many times, heartily, if I am to believe them, hoping to find salvation. You have prayed before the sermon began that the Lord would really bless the sermon to you. Now, pay attention. I do not understand you at all; I cannot make you out; because the way of salvation is open to you at this very moment, and it is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." You have nothing to wait for, and all your waiting is sinful. If you say you are waiting for the stirring of the pool, I tell you there is no pool to be stirred, and no angel to stir it. That pool was dried up long ago, and angels never go that way now. Our Lord Jesus Christ shut up Bethesda when he came, and said to the man lying there, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." That is what he says to you. You have no business waiting; but as you are, and are here this morning, I would earnestly invite you at the word of Christ, who has bidden us preach the gospel to every creature—"believe and live." Let down the net once more, and let it down this way; say, "My Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Breathe a prayer now to Jesus that he would accept you. Submit yourself to him, and beseech him to become now at this moment your Saviour. You will be heard. Plenty of fish are waiting to be taken in the net of faith. At the Lord's word let it down.

But I will now speak to others present, who have been letting down their nets, in vain, perhaps, in the form of importunate prayer. Have you been praying for the conversion of a relative, or pleading for some other good thing which you believe to be according to the will of God, and after long pleading—pleading in the night, for your spirit has been sad—are you tempted never to offer that petition any more? Now then, at Christ's word, who said that men ought always to pray and not to faint—at Christ's word, who says, "Pray without ceasing," let down the net, and pray again. Not because the circumstances which surround you are more favourable, but simply because Jesus bids you, continue in prayer; and who knows but that this very time you will meet with success!

Or have you been searching the Scriptures to find a promise which will suit your case? Do you want to get hold of some good word from God

that will cheer you? Shoals of such fish are around your boat; the sea of Scripture is full of them: fish of promise, I mean, but, alas! you cannot catch one of them. Nevertheless, try again. Go home this afternoon, and search the Scriptures again with prayer, and beseech the Holy Spirit to apply a precious portion to your heart, that you may by faith enjoy the sweetness of it; and who knows but you shall this very day obtain your desire, and receive a larger blessing than your mind can fully contain, so that in your case also the net shall break through the fulness of the favour.

Or it may be you have been labouring a long while after some holy attainment; you want to conquer a besetting sin, to exercise firmer faith, to exhibit more zeal, and to be more useful, but you have not yet gained your desire. Now, then, since it is the Lord's mind that you should be "perfect in every good work to do his will," do not cease from your purpose, but at his word let down your net again. Never despair. That temper of yours will be conquered yet; that unbelief of yours will give way to holy faith. Let down the net, and all the graces may yet be taken in it, to be yours for the rest of your life. Only at Christ's word still labour for the best things, and he will give them to you.

Or are you seeking just now the closer presence of Christ, and a nearer fellowship with him? Are you yearning after a sight of his face—that face which does outshine the morning? Do you wish to be brought into his banqueting-house to be satiated with his love? And have you cried in vain? Then cry once more, "at his word," for he bids you come to him: his loving voice invites you to draw near. At his word press forward once again, let down the net once more, and joys await you unspeakable, surpassing all you have hitherto experienced.

Thus you see that there is a just application of the great principle of the text to our spiritual profiting. God help us by his gracious Spirit to carry it out from day to day.

III. The great principle of our text should be applied to OUR LIFE-BUSINESS. And what is the life-business of every Christian here? Is it not soul-winning? That we may glorify God by the bringing of others to the faith of Christ is the great object of our remaining here on earth: otherwise we

should have been caught up to swell the harmony of the heavenly songs. It is necessary for many wandering sheep here below that we should tarry here till we have brought them home to the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls.

Our way of winning men for Christ, or, to use his own metaphor, our method of catching men, is by letting down the net of the gospel. We have learned no other way of holy fishery. Men with great zeal and little knowledge are inventing ingenious methods for catching men, but for my part I believe in nothing but letting down the gospel net, by telling out the story of the love of God to men in Christ Jesus. No new gospel has been committed to us by Jesus, and he has authorized no new way of making it known. Our Lord has called all of us to the work of proclaiming free pardon through his blood to all who believe in him. Each believer has a warrant to seek the conversion of his fellows. May not every man seek to save his brother from the burning? Must not Jesus smile on any man's endeavour to deliver his neighbour from going down to eternal death? Has he not said, "Let him that hears say, Come"? Whosoever hears the gospel is to invite others to come to Christ. The word of the Lord is our warrant for keeping to our one work of making known the gospel: it would be a sorry act of mutiny if we were either to be silent, or to preach another gospel which is not another. The word of the Lord is a warrant which justifies the man who obeys it. "Where the word of a king is there is power." What higher authority can we need? "Oh, but," they say, "you ought to advance to something higher than the mere elementary doctrine of grace, and give the people something more in keeping with the progress of the period." We shall not do so while Jesus bids us go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. If we do what he bids us the responsibility of the matter rests no longer with us. Whatever comes of it we are clear if we have obeyed orders. A servant is not to justify his master's message, but to deliver it. This makes it a joy to preach, this doing it "at thy word." Our business is to do what Christ tells us, as Christ tells us, and to do this again and again, so long as we have breath in our bodies. The commanding word cries ever to us, "Preach the gospel, preach the gospel to every creature!" Our justification for setting forth Christ crucified, and incessantly bidding

men believe and live, lies in that same word which bade Peter walk the sea, and bade Moses fetch water out of a rock.

The result of this preaching will justify him who commanded it. No man at the last will be able to say to the Saviour, "You set your servants an impossible task, and you gave them an instrument to wield which was not at all adapted to produce its end." No, but at the closing up of all things it shall be seen that for the salvation of the elect there was nothing better than a crucified Saviour, and to make that crucified Saviour known there was no better means than the simple proclamation of his word by honest lips in the power of the Spirit of the Lord. The foolishness of preaching will turn out to be the great proof of the wisdom of God. Brethren, you that teach in the school, or you that preach from the pulpit, or distribute tracts, or speak personally to individuals, you need not be afraid but what wisdom will clear herself from all charges, and justify her own methods. You may be called a fool today for preaching the gospel, but that accusation, like rust on a sword, will wear off as you use the weapon in the wars of the Lord. The preaching of the word soon puts down all clamours against itself: those clamours mainly arise because it is not preached. No one calls the gospel weak where it is striking right and left like a great twohanded sword. Our reply to the outcry about the failure of the pulpit is to get into it and preach with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

Indeed, this word of Christ, whereby he gives us his warrant for letting down the net, is such that it amounts to a command, and it will leave us guilty if we do not obey. Suppose Simon Peter had said, "We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; and therefore, notwithstanding thy word, I will not let down the net"? Then Simon Peter had been guilty of disobedience to his Lord, and blasphemy against the Son of God. What shall I say to any of my fellow Christians who profess to be called of God, and to be Christ's disciples, and yet never do let down the net? Is it so that you are doing nothing for the truth? that you never spread the gospel? Is it so that you call yourselves lights of the world, and yet never shine? that you are sowers of the seed, and yet forget that you have a seed-basket? Am I addressing any members of this church who are in this respect wasting their lives? Is it so that it is professedly your life's object to be

fishers of men, and yet you have never cast a net, nor even helped to draw one on shore? Are you dwelling among us under false pretences? Are you mocking God by a fruitless profession which you never try to make fruitful? I have not the strength with which to condemn you, but I would to God your own conscience might fulfil that office. What shall be said of the man to whom the Lord gives it in charge that he shall make known the glad tidings of salvation from eternal misery, and yet he is sinfully silent? The great Physician has entrusted you with the medicine which heals the sick; you see them die about you, but you never speak of the remedy! The great King has given you the meal with which to feed the hungry, and you lock the storehouse door, while the crowds are starving in your streets. Is not this a crime which may well make a man of God weep over you? This great London of ours is growing heathenish to the very core, and yet our Lord has given the gospel into the hands of his churches; what can be the reason of the indifference of the godly? If we keep this gospel to ourselves, truly coming ages will condemn us as cruel to our future generations. Succeeding generations will point to our era, and say, "What sort of men were these, that had the light, and shut it up in a dark lantern?" In a century to come, when others shall stand in this city, and walk these streets, they will say, "A curse upon the memory of the ministers and people who failed in their duty, who came to the kingdom in a solemn time, but never realized their calling, and so missed the end and object of their being!" May we be spared from such a calamity as this. Yes, we have a warrant for labouring to spread the truth of God, and more than a warrant; we have a statute from the throne, an urgent command, and it is woe to us if we preach not the gospel.

Now, brethren, this warrant from Christ is one which, if we be in the state of heart of Simon Peter, will be omnipotent with us this morning. It was very powerful with Simon Peter. For, observe, he was under the influence of a great disappointment, yet he let down the net. "We have toiled all the night." Some say, "We have had all this gospel preaching, we have had all these revivals, all these stirs, and nothing has come of it." When was that? I hear a good deal of this talk, but what are the facts? "Oh," you say, "you know we have had a great deal of revival a little while

ago." I do not know anything of the sort. We have had flashes of light here and there, but comparatively so little that it is a pity to make so much of it. Moreover, considering the little that has ever been done for it, the spread of the gospel has been marvellous. Look at gospel-work at the present moment in India! People say that the Christian faith is not spreading. I say that it is spreading wonderfully as compared with the labour expended and the sacrifice made. If in that land you spend a penny and get a thousand pounds, you have no right to say, "What is that? We want a million." If your desires are such as this, prove their sincerity by corresponding action. Increase your outlay. The harvest is wonderful considering the little seed, but if you wish for more sheaves sow more. The church has had an enormous return for what little she has done. In England there have been partial revivals, but to what have they amounted? A flash of light has been seen in a certain district, but darkness has still remained supreme over the length and breadth of the country. The papers have reported a great work in a certain spot, but if the papers had reported the places wherein there has been no revival we should have had a different view of things! A little corner at the top of a column would have sufficed for the good, and column after column would not have sufficed to make known the black side of the situation. The fact is the church has scarcely ever been in a state of universal revival since the day of Pentecost. There has been a partial moving among Christians every now and then, but the whole mass throughout has never burned and flamed with the earnestness which the grand cause demands. Oh, that the Lord would set the whole church on fire! We have no cause whatever for disappointment. In proportion to the little effort put out great things have come to us; therefore let us get to our nets again, and say no more about the night in which we have toiled.

But next, this command in Peter overcame his love of ease. Evidently he was tired when he said, "We have toiled all the night." Fishing is hard work, especially when no fish are caught. It is natural to wish to be excused from further toil when you are already weary with unrewarded labour. I have heard some Christians say, "You know I had my time in the Sunday school years ago, and then I used to work too much for my strength." No doubt their efforts were stupendous in their youthful zeal; we can hardly

imagine what they must have been like, for nothing remains to assist our conceptions. At this time they feel authorized to take things easy, for they owe no more to their Lord, or at least they do not intend to pay any more. Is it so that any one of us can cease from service when it is plain that we do not cease from receiving mercy at the Lord's hands? Are we not ashamed of the case when it is plainly put? "Take it easy." Yes, soon, very soon, we shall take it easy, for there will be rest enough in the grave. Just now, while souls of men are perishing, to relax our efforts is wickedness. No, no, Peter, although you may be now in a dripping sweat through having toiled all night, you must get at it again. He does so. The night's work is nothing, he must work in the day too, if he is to catch fish.

Moreover, the command of Christ was so supreme over Peter that he was not held back by carnal reason, for reason would say "If you could not catch fish in the night you will certainly not do so in the day." Night was the special time for taking fish on the Gennesaret lake, and by day, when the garish sun was lighting up the waves, and letting the fish see every single mesh of the net, they were not likely to come into it; but when Christ commands, the most unlikely time is likely, and the most unpromising sphere becomes hopeful. No act is out of season when Christ commands it. If he says, "go," go at once, without deliberation. Say not "There are yet four months, and then comes harvest." "The fields are white already to the harvest." Peter lets down the net at once, and wisely does he act at Christ's word.

The lesson to you and to me is this: Let us do as Peter did, and let down the net personally, for the apostle said, "I will let down the net." Brother, cannot you do something yourself with your own heart, lips, and hands? Sister, cannot you do something yourself with your own gentle spirit? "I was thinking about getting half a dozen friends to form a committee to relieve the poor around us." Nothing will ever come of it: the poor will not get a pot of soup or a piece of bread. Set about it yourself. "But I think I might get a dozen to come together, and organize a society." Yes, and then move resolutions and amendments all day long, and finish up with passing votes of mutual approval. You had better get to work yourself as Peter did.

And you had better do it at once, for Peter immediately let down the net, as soon as ever he had launched out into the deep. You may never have another opportunity; your zeal may have evaporated, or your life may be over. Peter, however, only let down one net, and there was the pity of it. If John and James and all the rest had let down their nets, the result would have been much better. "Why?" say you. Because, through there being only one net, that net was overstrained, and broke. If all the nets had been used, they might have taken more fish, and no net would have been broken. I was reading some time ago of a take of mackerel at Brighton; when the net was full, the mackerel sticking in all the meshes made it so heavy that the fishermen could not raise it, and the boat itself was in some danger of going down, so that they had to cut away the net and lose the fish. Had there been many nets and boats they might have buoyed up the whole of the fish; and so they might have done in this case. As it was, many fish were lost through the breaking of the net. If a church can be so awakened that each individual gets to work in the power of the Holy Spirit, and all the individuals combine, then how many souls will be captured for Jesus! Multitudes of souls are lost to the blessed gospel because of our broken nets, and the net gets broken because we are not well united in the holy service, and by our unwisdom cause loss to our Master's cause. Ministers need not become worn out with labour if all would take their share: one boat would not begin to sink if the other boats took a part of the blessed load.

Now, brothers and sisters, I close by saying that if I have accomplished anything this morning by the help of God's Spirit, I hope I have made you ready to accept the following directory of service drawn from the text. The way in which to serve God is to do it at his word. I pray that none of us may sink into serving the Lord as a matter of routine. May we never fall to serving him in our own strength. We must preach, teach, and labour in his name, because we hear him bidding us do it. We must act at his word. If this were the case we should work with much more faith, with much more earnestness, and with much more likelihood of success. It is a blessed thing to see Christ sitting in the boat while you cast out the net. If

you catch a glimpse of his approving smile as he watches you, you will work right heartily. We must labour in entire dependence upon him, not preaching or teaching because in our judgment it is the right thing to do— Peter did not think so—but because Jesus gives the word, and his word is law. You may not work because you have any expectation of success from the excellence of your work, or from the nature of the people among whom you labour, but because Jesus has given you the word. You stand there doing a thing which critics sneer at as absurd, but you do it in all confidence, believing that it must be wise, because Jesus bids you do it. I remember well how some of our brethren used to talk to us. They said, “You preach the gospel to dead sinners; you bid them repent and believe. You might just as well shake a pocket-handkerchief over a grave and bid the corpse come out of it.” Exactly so. They spoke the truth, but then I would delight to go and shake a pocket-handkerchief over graves and bid the dead live if Jesus bade me do so. I should expect to see the cemetery crack and heave from end to end if I were sent on such an errand by the Lord. I would accept the duty joyfully. The more absurd the wise men of our age make the gospel out to be, and the more they show that it is powerless to produce the end designed, the more will we persevere in our old method of preaching Jesus crucified. Our resolves are not to be shaken by that mode of reasoning. We never did draw our argument for preaching the gospel from the work itself, but from the orders given us to do it, and we would rather be acting upon the responsibility of Christ than upon our own. I would rather be a fool and do what Christ tells me, than be the wisest man of the modern school, and despise the word of the Lord. I would rather lay the responsibility of my life at the feet of him who bids me live according to his word than seek out an object in life for myself, and feel that the responsibility rested on my own shoulders. Let us be willing to be under orders to Christ, willing to persevere under difficulties, willing to begin anew in his service from this very hour. Amen.