

CHAPTER 16

FISHING FOR MEN

SIMON AND ANDREW grew restive from the everlasting mingling with people. "We are fishermen," they said, "and the drawing in of fish is like balm to our souls. The men we used to go out with are scorning us and calling us lazy louts and fools. We are going fishing tonight after the Master is through and show them that we are still the best fishermen on the lake." There was resentment in their voices.

Early the next morning the crowds of people again began to gather by the lake hoping to hear Jesus go on with his parables as he had done the day before. When Jesus reached the lake no boat was docked in which he might sit to speak. Presently crawling out of the fog came the sturdy craft of Simon and Andrew.

I never saw Simon's face filled with such gloom. He and Andrew leaned back on their oars.

"How was the fishing?" called Jesus cheerily.

Dead silence followed. Then Simon broke out almost fiercely.

"We caught nothing. Not a thing! And we boasted to the Benadad brothers about what we were going to take. Our pride is crushed."

"We're tired, wet and hungry, too," added Andrew. Just then another boat came out of the fog.

"Who is that?" asked Jesus.

"John and James," replied Andrew. "They, too, went out expecting to bring back to our band the honor of having the best team of fishermen on the lake."

"Did they catch anything?"

"Not a thing. Their luck was as bad as ours."

"Call them to draw up close until I tell you something. Did you hear what I said to the Pharisees the other day, that it is not what enters into a man from without that defiles him, but what issues forth from within him—his hate and pride—that defiles him and makes him ill?"

"Yes, we heard you," said Simon.

"Well, it is this same inner greed and hate and pride that can defile your efforts and make your business ill just as naturally as it makes your body ill. Did you not go out fishing last night with envy and resentment and pride in your hearts?"

"We only wanted to show these fine neighbors of ours that we were better fishermen than they. We thought it would be easy."

"Well, have you gotten over your pride and resentment and jealousy?"

"No, it has grown," said the honest Simon.

"But we can," interposed Andrew humbly.

"We didn't think it had any relation to our fishing luck!" said James from his boat.

"Now that you do understand, go out and let down your nets."

"But we have been fishing all night without results!" objected Simon.

"Do as I say," commanded Jesus. "Let down your nets."

I shall never forget that haul. Simon's boat actually would have gone down under the weight had he not leaped into the water up to his breast and come wading to shore, leaving to his brother Andrew the job of rowing back the boat.

"O Master Jesus," he cried as he came splashing in and fell on his knees, "I am a sinful man! I didn't realize how my human pride and resentment could curse us. Deliver me henceforth from such evil thoughts, I pray!"

"If you have learned this lesson, Simon, you are ready for the next. Remember I told you that if you followed me, I would teach you how to become fishers of men?"

Come Follow Me

"Yes."

"The law of the one is like the law of the other," continued Jesus. "You cannot catch fish with pride or with anger or with greed in your heart. And neither can you catch men. Turn those fish over to your helpers on shore and as soon as your boat is ready let me get in and push off again. I will teach you how to fish for souls."

The boat of James and John was ready first, so leaving their own to be unloaded, Simon and Andrew scrambled in with them. They steadied the boat while Jesus entered and seated himself in the bow. From where I stood on the dock I could hear him say,

"I shall now describe to you those new nets that we have been talking about, the nets that will bring souls into the Kingdom. The meshes running one way are Love; the meshes running the other way are Truth. Where these two meet and intertwine you shall always be able to catch your men. Where there is only one set of strings and they run only one way, men may come to you, but they shall not remain."

"And what is the bait that can draw them?" asked Simon with a smile.

"The bait will be stories of life that you shall call parables. These they will swallow and later digest, and those who tarry over them longest will be caught up and saved in the net. For as the fisherman devours the fish which he catches, so that the fish and he become one in body, after similar fashion the heavenly Father will take into His heart those who are caught in the nets of Love and Truth, and in an infinitely higher way He and they shall become one in soul."

Wistfully I watched them push out from the pier, the four fishermen and Jesus. How I wished that I could have been one of them.

Having arrived at the right distance from the shore, and the crowds having seated themselves in tiers along the sloping bank, Simon dropped anchor and Jesus began to speak:

"A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell on the road and the birds came and ate them up. Some fell on stony soil where they had not much earth and shot up at once because they had no depth of soil; but when the sun rose they got scorched and withered away because they had no root. Some fell among thorns and the thorns sprang up and choked them. And others fell on good soil and bore a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirtyfold. He that has ears to hear, let him hear."

He paused and then said, "As we sit in silence under the sky, let your thoughts swim around this parable for awhile even as the fish weave their way through the seaweed beneath this boat. See if you can draw some message from it that applies to you." He paused again and then added, "Not to your neighbor, but to *you!*"

Presently the crowd about me broke into a subdued hubbub of conversation.

"There are some people who catch this inner message very quickly and lose it very quickly," ventured a farmer sitting beside me.

"They are the shallow," said an old man on the other side.

"Some gather it slowly but it sticks because their soil is good," said another. "But as for me I am so full of briars and thistles that it would have no room to grow if I did catch it."

I listened, fascinated, to the conversation this brief parable had stimulated. Each one was trying his best to interpret the allegory. And many, obedient to Jesus' injunction, were applying it to their own lives. Finally Jesus spoke again, and the throng on the shore became silent as they listened with absorbed attention. Parable after parable fell from his lips until every nook and cranny of the human soul had been reached before he was through.

When he ceased and the boat came in to shore, four enthusiastic fishermen leaped to land.

"We have learned more this day," said the thoughtful Andrew, "than in all the other days of our lives put together. Hereafter I shall be a fisher of men."

Come Follow Me

Chapter 16 page 2

CHAPTER 17

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

AT DINNER TIME Thomas put a profound question to the Master.

"You told us that a man is defiled not by the materials taken into his mouth, but rather by the thoughts and emotions within him which find expression in his words and actions. Well, news has just reached us that some of our fellow townsmen have been slain by Pilate because of breaking restrictions he set in Judea against the offering of sacrifices to Jehovah for the deliverance of the nation. Thousands participated but Pilate, clever and careful as he is, did not shed the blood of the many, as some of us feared. Rather he chose a score of them and slew them right in the midst of their sacrifices. Are we to believe," concluded Thomas, "that these, because of some past sins, must have drawn the suffering especially to themselves?"

"Had perfect innocence of all sin and all evil thoughts been theirs," said Jesus, "they might have escaped entirely. But by that test, every one of the thousands equally deserved to die. It is only by the grace of God and His infinite mercy that the rest of you are escaping most of that which your own shortcomings would draw unto you. So why condemn those Galileans who suffered this end, as worse sinners than the rest? I tell you, no; unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or do you think that those eighteen men killed by the fall of the tower of Siloam were worse offenders than the rest of the residents of Jerusalem? I tell you, no; unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Only by the grace of God, by His mercy which extends to us as far as the east is from the west, do we, too, escape. There is only One who is entirely good, and that is the Father."

"Take Job," Philip persisted. "Would you agree with his three friends that *he* drew his evil fate upon himself?"

"That is different," replied Jesus. "That is the one case in history where Jehovah deliberately reversed the process of Divine Law. For a season he gave this particular portion of the world centering in Job completely into the hands of Satan. The laws of cause and effect were entirely reversed. Life was put wrong end to, merely to see whether Job, thus tempted, would forsake a God who allowed undeserved evil to fall upon one who did good. But Job might have escaped even then had he not left one loophole for evil to enter. Remember he said, 'That of which I was afraid is come upon me.' When one prays, it is not what he says in words that counts but what he says in his heart. When one asks for health in words but in his heart fears that leprosy will come upon him, he is in fact inviting the plague to take possession of him."

"Yet," broke in Matthew, "when Job finally rose equal to the test demanded of him, his inner good was rewarded with homes, children, and prosperity in double portion."

"No matter how dark the evil," commented Jesus. "If one holds his eyes steadfast on God, victory always comes in the end."

As Jesus spoke, with arms extended, he was gazing at the sky. On the hard ground behind him I saw the shadow of the cross. Ringing in my ears were those words I shall never forget. "No matter how dark the evil, if one holds his eyes steadfast on God, victory always comes in the end."

"Look yonder," said Thomas, pointing to a blind beggar a short distance away. "What drew blindness to this man, his sins or the sins of his parents?"

Jesus turned to Thomas and replied, "Neither for his own sin nor his parents!—it was to let the work of God be manifest in him. While daylight lasts, we must be busy with the work of God; night comes, when no one can do any work. Now watch the way the darkness of this man can be turned into light for the glory of God."

Come Follow Me

With these words he went up to the blind man and made clay with saliva, which he smeared on the man's eyes, saying, "Go wash your eyes in the pool of Siloam."

Quick to respond to a need, Andrew rose and led him away.

"You still haven't made this clear to me," persisted Thomas. "Would you say point blank that evil is usually drawn upon one by himself?"

"Yes, nearly always," said Jesus. "The poison that one takes in through his lips by eating infected food doesn't compare with the poison one creates within his body by infected thought. When one thinks murder thoughts he is already sowing seeds of death. The time is coming when mankind will recognize the fact that people who throw out thoughts of envy, hate and intolerance are just as dangerous to themselves and society as people who throw poison into wells."

"But there is one thing that bothers me," said Nathanael, the sensitive one, "and that is the statement in the Table of Laws that the sins of the parents will be visited upon their children to the third and fourth generation. That hardly seems fair."

"You forget how that is offset by what follows," said Jesus, "which shows how much more permanent and far reaching is the power of virtue passed on by the parents. 'For I, Jehovah, am a jealous God, visiting the *iniquity* of the fathers upon the *third* and *fourth* generation and' —listen to this— 'showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments!' Contrast that word *thousands* with the words *third* and *fourth*."

"I see!" exclaimed Nathanael. "The power of good is hundreds of times more permanent and far reaching than the power of evil—three hundred times to be exact. If one has enough good, the evil should have no power to resist it?"

"Yes," said Jesus. "Even a tiny deed of good, just a cup of cold water given to one of the least of these in the name of redemptive Love, does not fail to attract its reward." I don't know of anything that gave such a sweeping sense of peace as those words from Jesus.

We were sitting in the quietude of their spell upon us when we saw Andrew hurrying down the road. He spoke a little breathlessly.

"I have a wonderful report to give you! It is a long story, but it happened fast—one thing right after another!

"The man who was born blind washed in the pool of Siloam as you commanded him, and went home seeing! Whereupon the neighbors and those to whom he had been a familiar sight as a beggar said, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'It is'; others said, 'No, but it is like him.' He said, 'I am that man.' So they asked him, 'How were your eyes opened?' When he told them the Pharisees scoffed and rebuked him. 'Give God the praise; this Nazarene you say healed you, we know quite well, is only a sinner.' To which he replied, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner; one thing I do know, that once I was blind and now I can see.' "

Simon turned to the Twelve and said with conviction, "At last I understand the problem of suffering. Its first use is to awaken human sympathy one for another, but its great use is for the glory of God. What we have just witnessed will redound to His glory as long as time shall last."

CHAPTER 18

INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS

AFTER THE HEALING of the man born blind, a delegation of Pharisees came down from Jerusalem and asked for a special interview with Jesus.

"Your positive teachings are all right," their chief spokesman said to him, "but you are leading people astray by not protecting them against evil. Evil is all around them, and you see it not. It is in the dirt of the market place and shop. Some of your disciples eat with unwashed hands. The tradition of the elders command that all wash their hands up to the wrists before every meal, that everything brought from the market should be washed before eating, that the cups and jugs and basins and beds should all be washed, and you not once remind them of these things.

"Neither are you neat about keeping the Sabbath. That should especially be kept clean of all action and of all deeds. You use it to heal the sick and teach the multitudes. And the fast days you neglect entirely. It is these fast days and Sabbath days that help good Israelites to keep clean of evil."

"The best way to keep clean of evil," replied Jesus, "is to be so filled with Love that no evil can enter, or if it does enter, it cannot take root."

"Love is the excuse weak people offer for breaking the law," insinuated the Pharisee. "Love is milk for babies. Law is meat for men. Through law and law alone are the sanctuaries kept clean."

"Your emphasis upon cleanliness," replied Jesus, "is, alas, only on the outer things. You make clean the outside of the cup and platter without washing the inside where the putrid and nasty remains. Tombs in the cemetery look imposing enough when plenty of whitewash is on them to cover the cracks, but inside they are full of dead men's bones. You blind Pharisees! You must first clean the inside of the cup and the dish so that the outside may be clean too. Like whitewashed tombs, outwardly you appear to men to be upright but within you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

"You have heard the Scriptures read so often that your hearing capacity has become hardened. Your hearts have been pounded on so long with old laws that the new truths I am trying to bring you do not penetrate. Little children can grasp the message of the Love of God in this fresh way before you can. Some people take so much time straining a gnat out of their soup that they cannot see the camel reach down and drink it all up."

Judas touched my shoulder and drew me aside. "Now he has done it!" he whispered in my ear. "He believes that only parts of the ancient Jewish law are of value. This is the ultimate heresy in the eyes of the Pharisees. They will never forgive him."

When the visitors had left, Thomas rushed up to Jesus. "Do you know," he declared, "that the Pharisees have taken offense at what you said?"

Jesus replied calmly, "Any plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone. They are blind guides of the blind, and if one blind man leads another, both of them will fall into a pit."

The awareness of where this was going to lead filled me with such apprehension and gloom that I hurried to Zebedee's home where I could take refuge until the controversy should blow over. Every time it came up I could hear the sound of a nail being driven into a cross, and I simply could not stand it.

The next day Zebedee entered the house almost as distraught as I was.

"Now it has happened!" he announced. "Jesus cast out an evil spirit from a man by the power of the inner presence of God. The Pharisees claimed that he did it because he had a strange unclean spirit within *himself*. They even named it Beelzebub. I never saw Jesus as aroused. He is usually so

Come Follow Me

forgiving, but this claim of theirs, he said, no man, not even God, can forgive—the blasphemy of calling the Holy Spirit of God an unclean spirit of evil! And were they bitter in return! This bodes good for no one."

"You and I know that he is the Messiah," Zebedee concluded in a lowered voice, "but the

people still think he is the Forerunner of the Messiah. The Pharisees are directing all their attack to expose him before the people as an impostor—that he is not even the Forerunner.

"The Forerunner should be able to derive signs from heaven, so they asked him for a sign today. He gave them a sign regarding the future in a way that none of us understood—that the Son of Man would be three days and nights in the heart of the earth."

Even as we were talking, two figures whom I supposed were James and John came in and seated themselves behind me on the nets of Zebedee. There was a heaviness in the air. I knew, then, that Jesus was not with them. Presently a very strange feeling came over me. I moved restlessly in my seat, and suddenly looked around to find Iscariot staring at me. It was he and the Zealot who had entered. In the silence that followed, I glanced again at Judas and found him still looking at me. I had the feeling one gets in a dream when he finds some creature continually eyeing him. It was as though he were looking me through and through, detecting my thoughts, aware that I belonged to some alien people and was perhaps a spy in their midst. How terribly discerning he was! Was it possible that he suspected I knew more about events which he was to be mixed up in than I was supposed to know—perhaps that I knew more about him than he felt it was good for me to know? The others had been accepting me so unconcernedly, so innocently as one of themselves, that I had grown to feel as though I had always belonged to them. And I was so tremendously interested in everything I had been observing, so fascinated by the words I had been hearing, that it had almost dropped out of my consciousness that I did know more about events that were going to happen than any of the rest of them except Jesus himself—yes, that I knew more about Judas Iscariot's future than perhaps it was healthy for me to know.

Then a great desire took hold of me, a veritable passion that almost shook me, so strong was its hold upon me—a desire to save Judas from what I knew was ahead of him; and a violent, inordinate desire to save Jesus from the misunderstanding, the terrible misunderstanding and hate of the Pharisees and those that were with them. It gave me some comfort to recall that there was no hate for him among the common people, although there might be much misconception of his teachings. But from the leaders—the religious leaders—ah, that is where protection was needed!

Startled, I looked again at Judas. His eyes dropped before my gaze as though reading my thoughts. My heart went out to him. "O Judas," I cried, "what can we do to keep people from misunderstanding Jesus?"

He sank down on a pile of rope beside the Zealot, who had been sitting there as still as a sphinx, and rested his chin in his right hand, swinging an end of the rope with his other.

"I'm afraid that nothing can be done," he sighed. "He is so stiff-necked on some things."

Just then John came in.

"Who?" he inquired. "Who is stiff-necked? But I'm glad I found you, Judas. Jesus has just been giving away all that he has to the people, feeding them out here. He was looking for you. He wants more to give. You carry the bag."

"And it is a good thing," retorted Judas, "that I wasn't there, for he would have given away everything."

"Why do the religious leaders misunderstand Jesus?" I asked Judas, rising to go with him to Jesus.

"Sit down," he commanded. "I am not going to him. He can come to me. People misunderstand him because he is not only stiff-necked but he is so unusual about it. He does such strange things. He

says that *he* is the way, the truth and the life. He tells his disciples not to study books but to study *him*. 'You will have books always,' he says; 'you will have me only a short time.' And then he tells us to eat him and drink him. That gets the Sadducees wrathful. And he says he can forgive sins. That turns the Pharisees mad with hate. And he breaks *every* rule in the ancient Law. I don't know

what we can do about it."

"He is not stiff-necked," said John. "He is like water; he is as meek as the flowing stream."

"But as determined on reaching his goal as the stream," I added.

"That is the same as stiff-necked," insisted Judas.

"No," reasoned John. "It is meekness in the highest degree. Like the flowing stream, he flows into any form anyone demands. When people come to him to be healed he doesn't command them, he lets them command him."

"What do you mean?" I asked, stimulated as I was always stimulated by John's words.

"I mean," said John, "that Jesus never *makes* things come to pass. His mighty works are, as my father says, *born* into manifestation. Without the faith of the one who seeks help joining with the faith of Jesus who wants to grant the help, nothing whatever happens. And this is what I mean by the meekness of Jesus. Jesus not only waits upon the faith of the one he heals, but he even accommodates his entire method of healing to the faith of the one he would help."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"Watch the way Jesus heals people. Every time it is he who obeys them instead of making them obey him."

"Give us an instance," demanded Judas, stubborn to the last.

In answer John put up a silencing hand. He pointed to the crowd gathering rapidly around Jesus just outside our door. We all rose and placed ourselves in the doorway where we could get a good view of the throng. A leper was coming toward Jesus. People were clearing a lane for him as pigeons scatter when a dog approaches. He prostrated himself on the ground before Jesus and cried, "Lord, if you *choose* you can make me clean."

Jesus looked down at him, and I could see love light up his eyes. Then quietly he replied in a clear voice, "I do *choose*. Be you made clean."

People gasped as they saw Jesus speak so easily, making no effort whatever, not even lifting his eyes in prayer. Now they gasped even more at what happened. Even from where I stood, I could see the unearthly, ashen white of the other's face and chest change to a healthy color. I saw the healthy hue spread till it covered his half-naked body. The man rose, looked down upon his transformed flesh, gave a great shout, and leaped for joy.

"I shall tell all the city!" he cried.

Jesus laid his hand upon his shoulder and said, "No, my friend. Tell no man of this. Go your way and show yourself to the priest and make him an offering in gratitude for your cleansing. Do that and that only. Thank the Father through the synagogue. Do not thank me."

John turned to us standing in the doorway and said, "Yesterday a centurion told him to command his servant to be well and he would be well. Jesus obeyed, and the servant became well. The day before that two men asked him to have mercy upon them and he said, 'I do have mercy,' and—"

The rest of his words were drowned out by the shout of a Roman officer, somewhat higher than the office of centurion, although I cannot remember the title they gave him, who had pressed forward and was accosting Jesus. Whether or not he had been returning from a banquet where he had drunk too much wine I know not, but none of the group was prepared for the violent onslaught he made upon the Master.

"Dog of a Jew!" he roared, taking his stand facing Jesus. "It is all very well for you to speak with authority as long as you confine it to bringing healing and other humble service to your masters. But mark you well, the moment you let this little authority of yours go to your head and you listen even for one minute to the mob that was yelling yesterday that they wanted to make you king, that moment

your body will be drawn and quartered and cast to the dogs in the street. Do you hear?"

Jesus looked at him with composure but made no reply. The situation was very tense. No one spoke. The Roman was feeling for his sword. Finally I could stand it no longer. To Philip who was standing beside me I whispered, "Why doesn't Jesus speak? Why doesn't he tell him that he runs away from the crowd whenever they seek to make him king, that he—"

I never finished. For I saw that the officer had dropped his sword back in its scabbard. His whole manner began to change. He ceased to roar and spoke more quietly. But the domineering tone was still there.

"I will give you a chance to prove your innocence. I, as your superior in this city and as a member of a superior race, command you to heal the son who bears my name and who is to inherit my fortune. Listen, Jew, you worker of signs and wonders, put your gift for once to good account and heal my son."

"I never heal," said Jesus. "Only God heals."

"You lie, you dog of a Jew!" The Roman was almost white with wrath. "You heal others—a centurion's Jewish servant, bah! And then refuse to heal one in whose veins runs the blood of Cicero himself."

"I never heal anyone," repeated Jesus quietly. "Only the Father heals—and He heals only on certain conditions."

"Do you mean that you refuse?" The officer was again reaching for his sword.

"Only God heals," Jesus stood before him in that gentle majesty that always was his when dangerous men confronted him. "The Father is the healer, not your Neptune of the angry sea, nor your Mars of the bloody sword. And He never heals when anger and pride take control."

"And so my religion is not good enough for you?" sneered the other. "What room in the Temple in Jerusalem does your doddering old God occupy, pray?"

"Neither in Jerusalem, nor in your Rome will you find Him confined to any room. For God is Spirit—the spirit of Love—and he who worships Him must worship Him in Love, Humility and Truth."

"I refuse to bow down to your soft-kneed God, Jew. My god must have something greater than love! Leave that for women. But stop this talk of gods. Obey my command, and heal my son!"

"I come only to the lost sheep of the tribe of Israel." And without a further word, Jesus turned and went quietly on his way.

The Roman stood thunderstruck. The crowd, also amazed at the courage and calmness of Jesus, now surged forward. Angry voices burst forth. The officer, sensing their hostility, evidently considered discretion wiser, and calling his servants about him, silently withdrew.

The others, filled with wonder and admiration, were following Jesus. I hurried after them. Overtaking Nathanael, I asked, "What did Jesus mean when he said he came only to the lost sheep of Israel?"

But Nathanael's attention was on something else. He had turned and was staring at two of the disciples who were struggling to hold back someone in the crowd. "Look yonder!" he exclaimed. A woman was trying desperately to break free from the restraint of the two. To my amazement the men were James and John.

"Loose her and let her go," said Jesus. "What does she want?"

"Here is a Syrophenician woman," explained James, "a half-breed from the north country, with no blood of Israel in her. She knows nothing of our Jehovah, for we asked her. She has never read the Law and the Scriptures. She merely wants to use you as a wonder-worker, a necromancer to perform a miracle upon her daughter. She is just as much an outsider as that Roman officer

you turned away just now."

"O Master," implored the woman, "if you could see my daughter—the only one I have on earth—all bent in pain and suffering, cruelly possessed by a demon! Do heal her! Call down your incantations and work your charms for her, and I will be eternally grateful."

Jesus looked at her steadily, seeing something that the rest did not see. Finally he said in an even voice, "But you do not understand the spiritual requirements that my people have been nurtured in. It is not fair to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs."

She knelt before him in great humility. Tender love shone from her eyes. "I would not take one iota of what does not belong to me, but under their master's table the dogs do pick up the children's crumbs, do they not? All I ask is a tiny crumb of your prayer and your blessing."

"O woman, you have shown great faith by the words you have spoken. Even though you have not been nurtured in the Law and the Prophets you have grasped the spirit of God. Your prayer is granted as you wish. The demon has left your daughter. Go in peace."