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Becoming Fishers of Men

And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men (Mark 1:17).

Our Lord spoke of His disciples "becoming fishers of men", and this clearly teaches the important lesson that such are not born, but made. The word "become" is in many respects one of the most interesting and suggestive in the New Testament, because it always implies a process and a progress. Thus the Apostle Paul urged the Christians at Corinth to "become" imitators of himself (1 Cor. 4:16;11:1). Many other passages in the New Testament similarly emphasize that the disciples were not then what they ought to be, but were to "become" so. Christians "become" fishers of men and this implies that they are not originally qualified in this respect. What, then, does it mean to "become" a fisher of men? In what does the training consist?

1. A fisherman needs WATCHFULNESS. Mark the alertness of the true fisherman; always on the lookout for fish, and for the best ways of catching it. So must it be with the true disciple of Christ, who wishes to win men for his Master. "They watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17). The fisher of men must be eager and on the lookout for men.

2. A fisherman needs PATIENCE. How wonderfully patient is the fisherman who remains hour after hour on the river bank, waiting for a bite. How utterly impossible it would be for him to fish with success unless he had this element of patience. Much more is this true of the servant of God who wishes to win men to Christ. "The servant of the Lord must be.....patient" (2 Tim. 2:24).

Men are not always won at the first attempt, and any spirit of impatience will not only hinder the sinner from accepting Christ, but will hurt the worker's own soul.

3. A fisherman needs COURAGE. Sea fishing in particular needs very great bravery and fearlessness. A fisherman often takes his life in his hands, and we know from our own fishing industry how many lives are lost in the carrying out of this daily task. So also fishing for men is by no means easy, and, as is well known, those who attempt it are often lacking in courage, and they do not find it any easier even after a long life of individual work. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power.....Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord.....but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God" (2 Tim. 1:7,8).

4. A fisherman needs TACTFULNESS. In the course of a day a man may often have to change his method, and also to use different kinds of bait. We also know that there are very great differences in fishing for various sorts of fish, and there are other diversities, according to locality and circumstance. All this suggests the need of tactfulness. When we think of spiritual fishing, tactfulness is one of the prime essentials. "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves" (2 Tim. 2:24,25). Men around us differ so widely in circumstances, character, temperament, and attitude to God that unless the Christian worker is characterized by tactfulness, he will often do more harm than good in his endeavors to win men for Christ.

5. A fisherman needs SELF-FORGETFULNESS. An old fisherman has said that one of the prime requirements of a true fisherman is that he should keep himself out of sight. This quality is pre-eminently necessary in the soul winner. His own individuality must be kept as far as possible in the background, in order that his Master may be first and foremost. There is always danger lest we attach men to ourselves instead of linking them on to Christ. "I labored.....yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). At the King's reception there comes a point at which, after the introduction of the newcomer, the one who introduces him stands aside, his work being over. In like manner, in bringing a soul to Christ we carry the work to a certain point, and then stand back for the soul to have its own private and personal interview with the Master.