

....AND SINNERS SHALL BE CONVERTED UNTO THEE



Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Psalm 51:10-13

When we have begun to come free from the need to impress human eyes with our labors in the Kingdom...

When we're satisfied that only God sees....

then we experience a new kind of discontentment

— a holy discontentment which comes from God himself.

We are no longer troubled...

- that people don't appreciate us,
- that nobody recognizes us.

Now we are troubled that too many of the lives we touch remain unconverted. We know from our own experience that the only hope for any human being is conversion — a total, lasting turn-around.

Superficial changes, cosmetic improvements mean very little.

- So he comes to Bible study now.
- So she's reading Christian books like mad.

But,

- if the old bondage of our past life is not broken,
- if those bars of iron on the soul fail to yield,
- if those gates of brass isolating the self-centered heart from God's mercy won't give,

.... Then we're still in the same old rut.

"Lord, all these people you have put in my path, yet after years of labor so few conversions. Why?"

The woman of Samaria who came to the well to draw water was drawn into conversation with Jesus and by the time the conversation is over,

- this woman is converted,
- she's turned around,
- her aimless heart is now fixed on this man who told her all she ever did.

But notice what happens when she leaves her water jar at the well. She goes back to the town and says to the people, *"Come see a man who told me all I ever did. Is not this the Christ?"*

And on the strength of her simple testimony ... many believed, were converted, turned around.

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony. "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

John 4:39-42



Is it too much to expect that in the town where we live words should be placed on our lips, as they were placed on that woman's lips, that would have the effect of converting, turning souls around, causing them to believe and seek Jesus and find Jesus, and really believe?

Surely it's not unrealistic to expect conversions. The harvest is ripe.

We're surrounded by people who, in their heart of hearts, long to be converted. You can almost hear the cry,

"Save me! Convert me! Show me the way to the Lamb. Bring me to the healing fountain!"

We are living at an hour when conversions should be abundant, when any assembly of believers which abides in the reality of the Lord's presence should be able to see conversions daily, almost anywhere — conversions that are lasting.

But we have to understand what kind of person is to be the channel of these conversions.

We have often thought it has to be hot shots, spellbinders, eloquent tongues.

The conversion of human hearts, which is the work of the Lord, has always been channeled through those....

.... who are very, very conscious of their own sin and their own desperate need of mercy.



The conversion of sinners is the work of the Lord.

Is he a celebrity? No. He's the one who became sin for us. Jesus stands down here in the mire with us and takes us by the hand. Nor is he some aloof spirit who hovers above us and saves us by remote control.

- Jesus is one of us.
- Jesus is our brother.
- Jesus is the Son of Man.

Jesus

- stands on the same earth,
- enters the same waters of baptism,
- breathes the same air,
- partakes of every temptation,
- dies our death.

And that person Jesus sent to us with the gospel of his cross, that person who really reached our hearts with the blood of the Lamb and brought us to life in his name, was it not a person who was acutely aware that he himself, she herself, was a sinner?

- Hourly in need of the blood of the Lamb.
- Continuously depending on God's grace for a clean heart and a right spirit.

Who was this who said,

"Then will I teach transgressors thy ways and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

.... A man who was overwhelmed with his own sin.

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."

Psalms 51:1-3



David was painfully conscious that what he had done with Bathsheba and what he had done to Uriah her husband when he had him killed were sins against God, that even when forgiven would leave lasting scars in their consequences.

"And yet - sinner that I am - if you will create a clean heart in me and renew a right spirit within me, and cast me not away from thy pre-sence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me, and restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a free spirit, then I will teach transgressors thy ways and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

"Then I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners will return to thee."

Psalm 51:13

These are not the words of some hot shot evangelist.

These are the words of a brokenhearted, contrite, penitent man, who is once again tasting God's goodness.

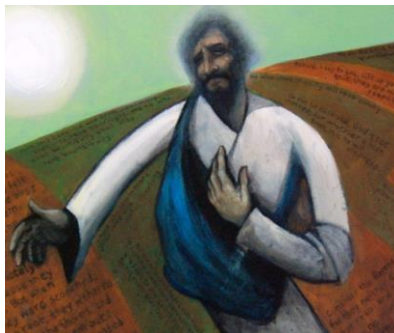
"Then I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners will return to thee."

Such words are presumptuous except from those who live in continuous thanksgiving to God for their own conversion.

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I'm found,
Was blind but now I see.*

- Grace.

- Amazing grace.



Where were you when Jesus found you? Down in the pit. So enmeshed in yourself you couldn't even think straight. Nothing but a salvaged wreck of hell, cleansed by the Lamb's blood.

How can we forget what he brought us from?

How can we forget that there's not one good thing in us except what the blood of the Lamb and the Spirit of God have granted us as a gift.

If he hadn't come to us,

torn us out of the web of evil, cleansed us, quickened us, where would we be?

"Then I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners will return to thee."

Such words are presumptuous except from those who re-member that they are still utterly dependent on the mercy of the Lamb.

We're just as dependent on that mercy now as the day he saved us,

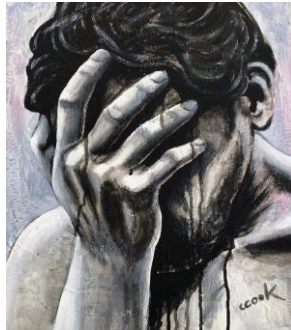
- for answers to our prayers,
- for daily bread,
- for the air we breathe,
- for peace in our hearts,
- for a vision of his presence.

Our only claim is his mercy.

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according to the multi-tude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." (Psalm 51:1)

"God be merciful to me a sinner." (Luke 18:13)

"Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity and quicken thou me in thy way." (Psalm 119:37)



"Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners will return to thee."

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

These words are presumptuous except from those who never stop crying to God for a clean heart and a right spirit.

Who of us would dare to say that we had a clean heart when we got out of bed this morning?

Who of us could say we now have a right spirit?

The effort is not to develop some new technique for converting sinners.

The effort is to pursue God for a clean heart, a right spirit,

- to come into the presence of God,
- to have the Holy Spirit in fact,
- to have restored to us the joy of salvation,
- to be upheld with the free Spirit of God.

Then, when we go out and say, *"Come see a man who turned my life around,"* people will respond.

If you live in the presence of God you can expect to see conversion.

If you dwell day and night in the mercy of the Lord, conversions will occur everywhere you go.

Almost without effort, and to your own amazement, your living testimony will show transgressors the ways of the merciful God and sinners will be converted unto him.

God is not sending people to us these days for us to turn them away empty.

- These knocks on our door.
- These calls on the phone.
- These letters from long lost acquaintances.
- These faces that rise up before us in our prayers.

These needs are channeled to us by the hand of God, that after all these years, after all these disappointments there might be conversions, radical changes, rebirths.

God help us to settle for nothing less.

God help us to live every hour of every day as converted souls ourselves,

- vessels which have received mercy
- as men and women who have found the peace of God in Jesus
- as people that are living in that peace and are able to impart that peace in all its life-changing power to those who are coming to us now with hungry hearts.



Prayer: Lord, we confess to you how much we ourselves are in need of your mercy. Help us to remember where you found us and still find us now. Without you, we have nothing to offer sinners. We lay our hearts before you, cleanse them, make us yours. And yes, may we live as vessels who have received your mercy, who have found true peace, who have something real and not superficial, something steeped in true life-giving power from you to offer to sinners...the lost...the empty...the wounded...the despairing. May they turn to you to find the same mercy, peace, and joy we ourselves are living in. Amen.

Maranatha Mirror

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